



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

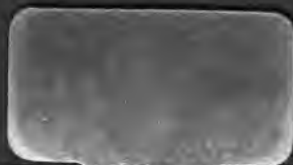
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600078686+

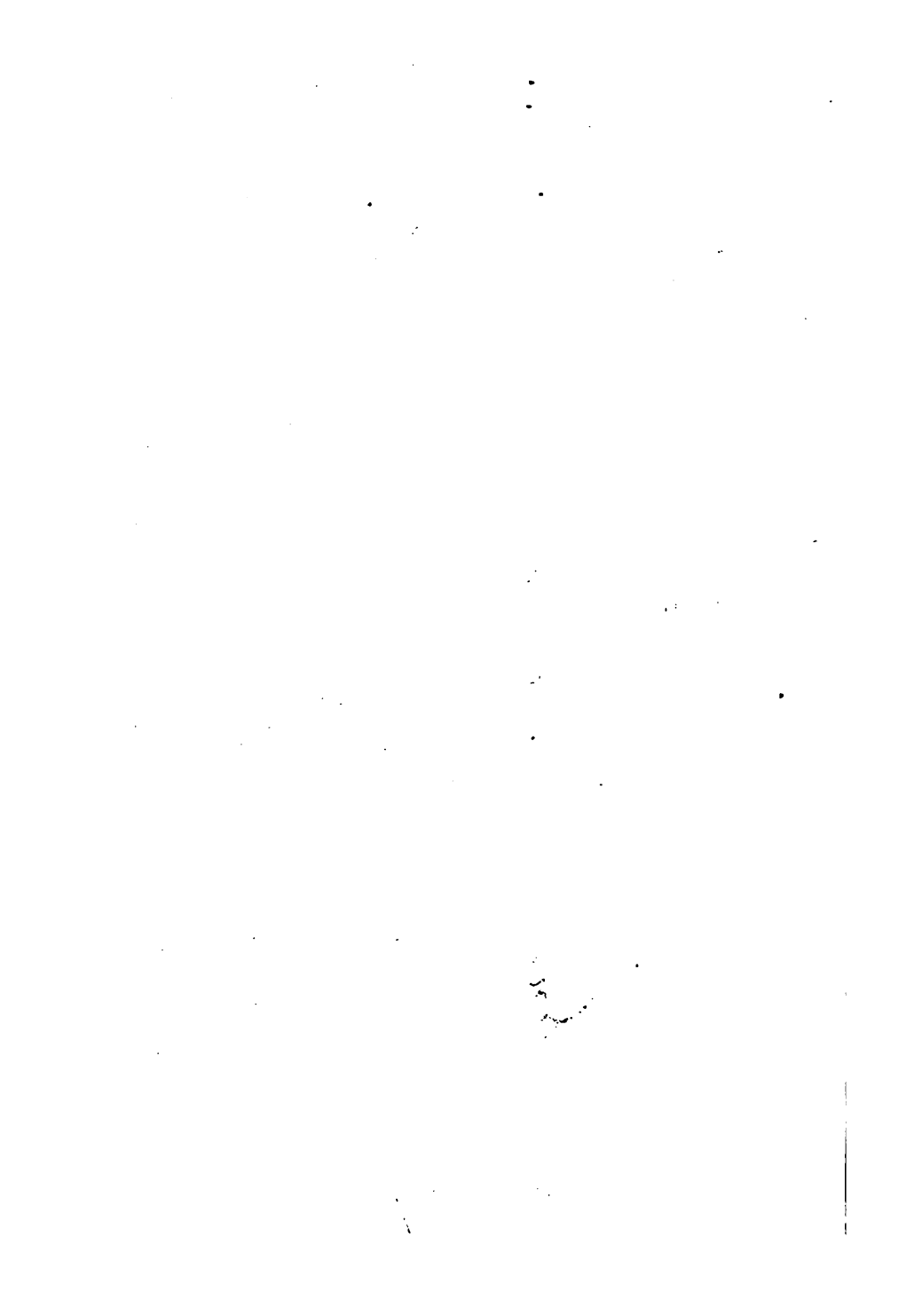






600078686+





JONATHAN.

A Novel.

BY

C. C. FRASER-TYTTLER,

AUTHOR OF "MISTRESS JUDITH," ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

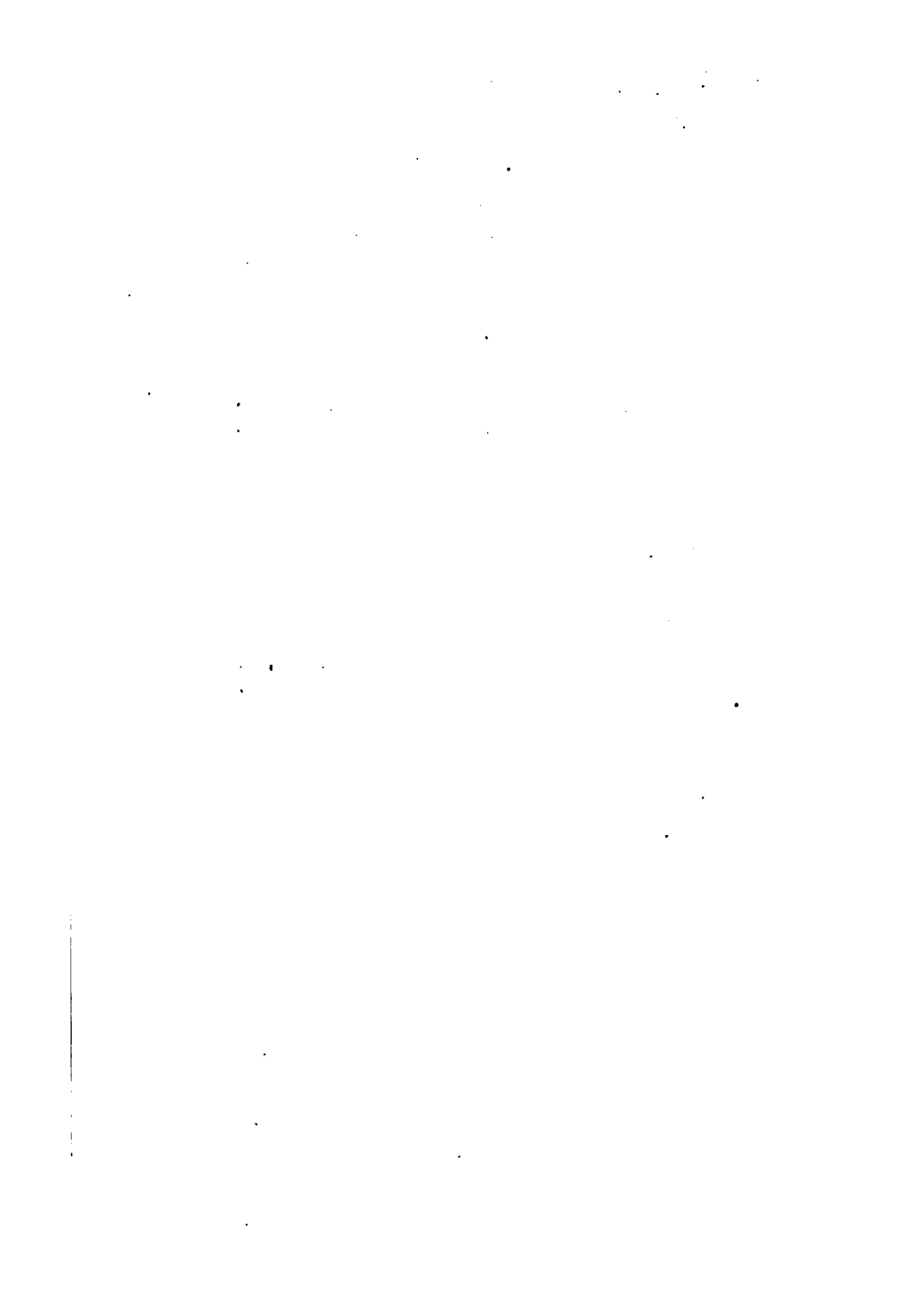


LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

1876.

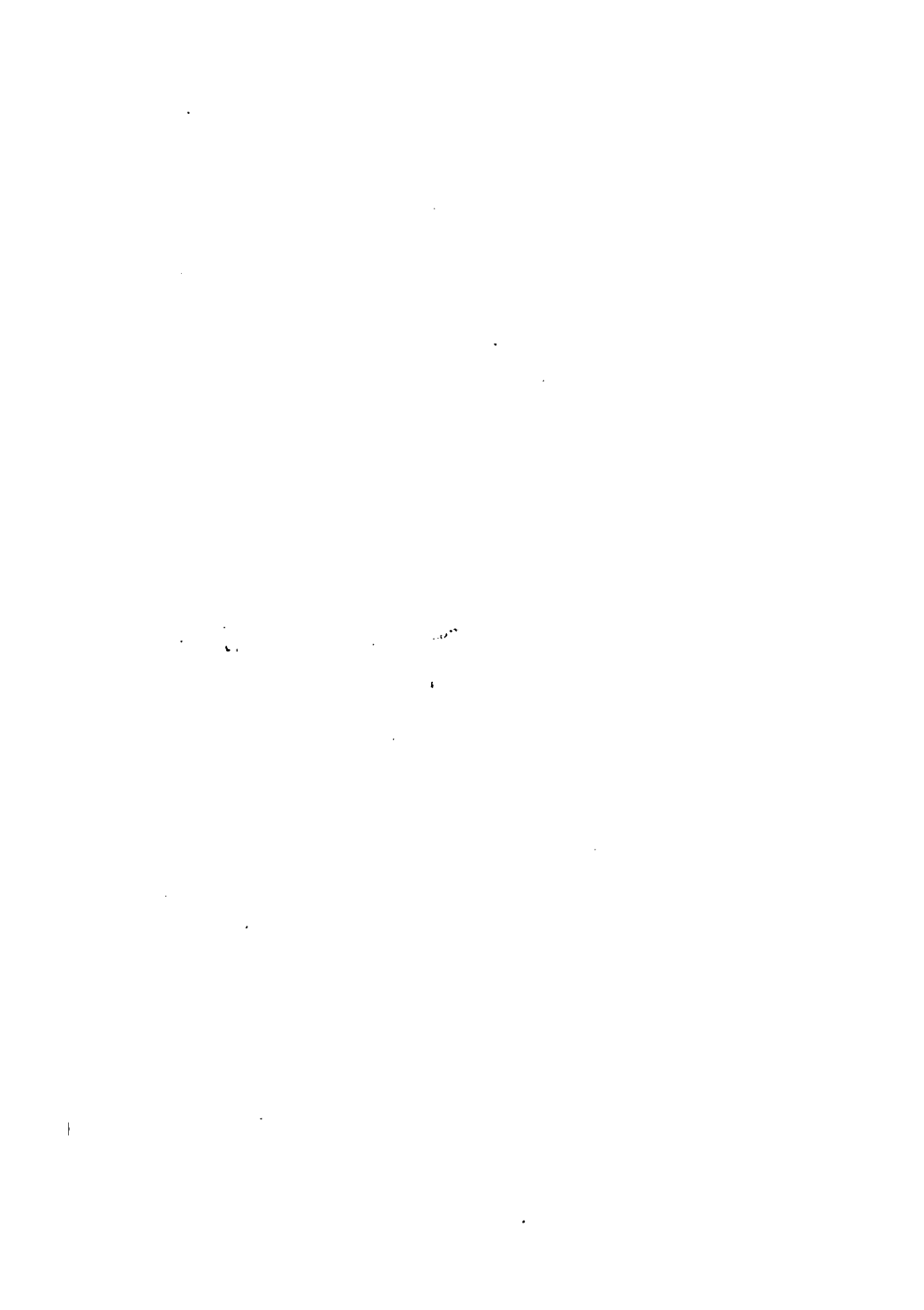
(All rights reserved.)

251. d. 359.



To

AUGUSTUS J. C. HARE.



CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. AARON FALK - - - -	1
II. SHELBOURNE PLACE - - -	10
III. JAEI'S HOME - - - -	19
IV. JAEI'S STORY - - - -	27
V. JONATHAN - - - -	35
VI. MR. BYLES'S WASHING DAY - -	46
VII. AN EVENT AT LAST - - -	56
VIII. WHAT PRISCILLA SAID - - -	64
IX. HOME FROM HEPRETH - - -	75
X. FOREBODINGS - - - -	90
XI. ILL NEWS FROM HOME - - -	98
XII. SIN AND SORROW - - - -	107
XIII. THE OLD BIBLE AND WHAT IT SAW -	117
XIV. AARON FALK'S SUNDAY - - -	134
XV. JAEI'S SECOND VISITOR - - -	143
XVI. THE ONE MAN WHO KNEW - - -	155
XVII. THE FALLING OF THE LEAF - -	165
XVIII. HOW WOULD ANDREW TAKE IT -	174
XIX. THE JOURNEY HOME - - - -	187
XX. "AY, I SAW HER" - - - -	197

CHAP.	PAGE
XXI. "THE LITTLE RIFT" - - -	- 206
XXII. EVER WIDENING - - -	- 217
XXIII. MR. BYLES'S END - - -	- 232
XXIV. A NINE DAYS' WONDER - - -	- 243
XXV. THE NEW "MASTER" - - -	- 253
XXVI. MISS LYNN - - -	- 263
XXVII. AND THE HOME SHE LIVED IN -	- 274
XXVIII. THE TIME OF THE SINGING OF BIRDS	- 284
XXIX. AARON FALK AT HOME - - -	- 296
XXX. INNOVATIONS - - -	- 304



JONATHAN.



CHAPTER I.

AARON FALK.

Tis a quiet May evening, and the chalk road between Hepreth and Shelbourne is coloured by the evening sun.

It dips here and there into a cutting, and then ascends again slowly to the top of a gentle hill. Sometimes, from such a hill you can see before you—if you have your face towards Hepreth—the steeples and tall chimneys of the little market

town, lying snugly in the valley, with a soft haze of thin blue smoke hanging above it. But if you are looking the other way, you will see nothing of Shelbourne, except the chimneys of the red inn which stands some way out of the village, at three cross roads, and from which you have to turn sharp round to the left if you want to find Shelbourne.

The monotony of the long chalk road is broken here and there by an elm wood, that comes down to the roadside, or by a sheet of hyacinths, lying like a blue bay in the heart of the wood. And earlier in the year the copses are carpeted with primroses and violets, and the little children of Shelbourne, with hot hands and dirty white thread, come to pick them and tie them up and carry them home to their mothers, or to Mrs. Myse, or "the minister."

Aaron Falk and his boy Ben Brewer often see them, as they pass along in the

gig from Hepreth market on Tuesdays. But it is somehow in keeping with the laziness and stillness of this evening that there should be no children in the copses : and that the only sound that breaks the stillness should be the lazy rolling of the gig wheels up the hills that billow this part of the way, and the far-off cawing of building rooks, at a farm half a mile distant.

Aaron Falk is in the gig, holding the reins loosely ; Bess, the mare, is taking her time, going from side to side to make the little hill less ; and Ben, the boy, is walking along whistling behind his master, and flicking the heads off the "lords and ladies" with his whip.

There is one other living thing in the still picture. At the top of a rising mound to which the hyacinths have climbed, a girl's figure is moving among them. She is gathering the hyacinths in lapfulls and putting them in her apron.

"I warrant she thinks she's gleaning," said Ben from the road, looking up at her.

The girl, hearing the sound of wheels, turned round, and followed them with her eyes.

Ben shook his whip at her. Then Mr. Falk drew up, and told him to get in, for they were at the top of the hill. And Bess, the mare, struck into a brisk trot, which she kept up till they had turned the corner by the Blue Dragon, and were close to the school. And the girl among the hyacinths watched them till they were out of sight.

"Take this to Mr. Byles," said Aaron Falk to Ben, stopping at the schoolmaster's gate.

"I've not forgotten it, you see, Mr. Byles," said he from the gig, as that person appeared at his door, and leant against the post at the entrance.

He was a shambling cadaverous man, with lanky legs upon which the trousers of two Mr. Byles seemed to be hanging; his chest was about a foot across, his cheeks fallen in, his jaw and temple bones protruding, his colour mottled, and a look of the most extreme despondency that was not unnatural rested on his face, and showed itself even in his limbs.

On this warm May evening he was wrapped round the throat with a red comforter, from which only his large blue ears and his melancholy face appeared. He held his hand pressed tenderly upon his person, as he answered Mr. Falk in broken sentences.

“I am sure I thank you, Mr. Falk, sir, —very kindly. It is a real char—ity, sir, to such as me. Anything that can alleviate my—symptoms—my lower chest, sir, as you know well, sir, is the seat of my—malady—disease, sir.”

“Yes, I know,” said Aaron good-naturedly, though he had heard the same sentence word for word a thousand times. “I hope the medicine may give you a good night. I shall always be glad to send for or bring anything for you from Hepreth, you know, Mr. Byles. Good-morning.”

And then he drove off, leaving the schoolmaster gazing at his bottle, which he caused to revolve slowly round in his skeleton fingers, and with a half-delivered sentence about his “situation—unfortunate position—aggravated malady—” on his lips.

There could hardly be a greater contrast than the well-to-do good-looking brewer, and his melancholy dyspeptic friend. And yet in a way they were friends. Aaron Falk was naturally kind-hearted: and in his prosperity and freedom from care, he took pity on any neighbour who was oppressed or in trouble. It was well known

he was the man to go to, if a small loan could save a poor man from being "sold up."

"Get out here, Ben," said he, when they got into the village, "and take up that to Mr. May. Joe can put up the mare."

Ben, with a large parcel, got down obediently. Mr. Falk turned through a green gate that Ben had opened and drove up a trim little avenue to his own door. A neat elderly servant-woman was there to receive him: Joe, the horsekeeper, touching his hat, was at the horse's head in a moment.

"The fish, sir?" said Sarah. "I hope you remembered the fish for your dinner."

"Fish! yes. You'll find it in the gig."

Aaron Falk kicked off his boots and threw himself into the arm-chair to read the *Hepreth Chronicle*.

Sarah had kept up a little fire, though it was not cold, just to make the parlour look cheerful.

And though Mr. Falk was still a bachelor at three and thirty, it did look cheerful ; far above the average of ordinary "parlours." There were plants in the window, and books on the tables. The inevitable square table was not there, filling up the greater part of the room and allowing only a humble passage round it for the use of the owners of the table. Nor was the inevitable yellow and red cotton tablecloth there : nor the case of wax flowers : nor the pervading smell of whisky and sherry and damp biscuits. Mr. Falk dined in another room, and wrote and read and did his business in this one.

But then it was well known he was a very superior man, a good shot, a first-rate horseman, a cultivated man among his very much less cultivated neighbours. And yet he got on with them all, and the men liked working for him better than for masters who were more like themselves, and

who had made their own way into the rank above them.

Mr. Falk's father had been a brewer, just as he was, and had held just such a position in Shelbourne. So had his father before him. And the old men liked to say that they had worked for three Mr. Falks, and "never had no faults to find with none of 'em."

• And it was the unquestioned right of Aaron Falk, as of his fathers, to sit at the Board of Guardians and speak a good word for the poor folk ; and to be consulted in all matters, spiritual as well as temporal, that concerned the Shelbourne parish.



CHAPTER II.

SHELBOURNE PLACE.



BEN found that carrying books by a string was not comfortable, even to his hard fingers, so he shouldered the parcel and went down the hill, which the village street followed, still whistling.

He was a very good boy, Ben ; the one son of his mother, he had no cares and no regrets, and he was always well fed, well clothed, and well housed : the latter, because "he was only one, instead of bein' a dozen," as his father used to say ; so there was room for them to live decently,

as few of the other folk could, in overcrowded Shelbourne and the neighbouring parishes.

It spoke much—but was it good or ill?—of the condition of the people, that they should be content to stay and overcrowd Shelbourne. There was a proprietor, who never lived there: the owner of three good houses, and as many fine estates, it was no wonder he did not care for the old “Place” at Shelbourne. To the artist it had some beauties: its fine old trees, its once lovely garden, the quiet little pond at the large gate where the cattle stand whisking their tails through long summer afternoons, and where the swans (that Aaron Falk has given to Mrs. Myse, and that he feeds, because Mr. May cannot afford to keep them,) go diving for fish in the clear water among the bright green weed: the little trout stream that runs along in its clear gravel bed, from the other side of the village,

feeding the pond, and running through under the arched stone bridge to turn a mill and wash clothes for the villagers on the other side : all these are pretty, and sweet to see, but it is not enough for some people. Yet, after all, the squire has perhaps done better with his house than to live in it : for he has given it to Mr. May, the curate, who lives there with his aunt, Mrs. Myse.

Shelbourne is one of those parishes, fortunately now few, but still too many, that, being in the hands of college consciences, fares badly, and stands still, while all the rest of the world goes on. The great tithes of Shelbourne are four or five hundred a year : the glebe is let : there is no vicarage. The preferment is refused by each fellow, until the feeblest and most despairing, whoever he may be, seizes the straw and accepts it. A hundred and fifty pounds a year and no house is not a tempting bait,

still less is it so when a man is in ill health, and when doctors and railways are alike far off. But out of the hundred and fifty pounds, the new vicar may employ a curate to do his work, and pocket fifty or sixty pounds a year. This curate is Mr. May : and through Mr. Falk's intervention, and because the squire has somewhere a kind corner in his heart, the big empty unfurnished "Shelbourne Place" is put at his disposal.

The little bridge over the pond is the beginning of the approach to the house. It curves round through fields, one sloping down to the water, the other, studded with large elms, losing itself in shrubbery to the left of the house. At this part of the grounds, left to itself and nature like all the rest, such a sea of daffodils comes up in spring that it looks like a little forest : and here the village children are allowed to come and pick them on Saturday afternoons.

Ben goes along the moss-grown approach and rings the front-door bell. It has become the custom for people to go to the front door whatever their errand may be, because Mrs. Myse generally opens it herself. And they don't like the idea of a lady, "let alone Mrs. Myse," coming to the back door.

The baker and the butcher alone drive round to the back.

"It 'ud never do for strangers to see pervisions goin' in at the front," they agree : though strangers are as rare as comets at Shelbourne Place. "And though she's as 'umble as 'umble, it ain't for us to be a 'umblin' of her more, and a 'arrogating from her position, like."

So the butcher in his bright blue smock, and the baker in his white hat, vie with each other in gallantry to Mrs. Myse. At first she had often held out her apron for the bread with a gentle smile on her small sallow face : but Hare, the baker, would no

more allow her to carry the bread in than he would allow the squire's wife herself. He takes his hat off, and with a cheery respectful "good-morning, ma'am," lays the two small loaves on the dresser in the kitchen.

"Nothin' more this mornin', ma'am?" he asks every time.

"Nothing more to-day, thank you; I am very much obliged to you, Hare," she answers every time, looking at the loaves all the while, to think how best she can cut them without waste.

After he is gone, she folds her yellow little hands together, and smoothes her thin hair streaked with grey.

"They are so good and kind and respectful," she says to herself, smiling gently with pleasure. "I am sure people *could* not be nicer or kinder than they are."

This is the little lady to whom Ben gives the books at the front door.

“Well, to be sure! another kind thought!” she says, standing in the doorway in her little rusty black dress. “How good of Mr. Falk!”

“They’re for the Reverend May, I take it,” said Ben.

“Yes, yes—it’s all right, thank you, Ben. And most kind of Mr. Falk it is. Give him Mr. May’s and my kind compliments and best thanks, Ben. And thank *you* too, for bringing them. It is a heavy parcel, Ben. And I shall see you again on Sunday, Ben.”

Ben having only arrived at Tuesday, and feeling Sunday school only just over, and behind him, stared a little with a concerned face.

At last he said collectedly,

“Yes, missus—if I’m spared to live to then.”

He looked very much like living, as he stood there, with his plump cheeks, and big

blue eyes. Even Mrs. Myse could see no cause for concern, as he walked off and began whistling again.

She shut the door, and went into a large room where her nephew was sitting at a table writing by the window.

"Alfred, dear — here are your books from the library. That *good* Mr. Falk has brought them from Hepreth, and just sent them up."

"How very kind," said the curate, laying down his pen and looking at the backs of the books, a look of quiet pleasure coming into his serene face. "We shall have a very pleasant evening, aunt."

"Yes, dear," and she added in an undertone more to herself than to her nephew — "we generally do have nice evenings."

The night wind passed with a shiver through the leaves of the magnolia at the window, and Alfred May coughed.

Mrs. Myse did not wait for another

cough, but rose and gently closed it. She lit the candles and put them on the table by her nephew : then she took her work and knitted silently in the twilight.



CHAPTER III.

JAEI'S HOME.



BEANTIME Ben had whistled his way back to the village, but not without company.

“Where’ve you been, boy?” asked a gruff, but rather high-pitched woman’s voice, that he recognised as the voice of Jael Thorne.

She caught him up, and they walked as far as the village green together. There Ben struck off up some stone steps, a short cut to Mr. Falk’s gate ; and Jael, satisfied as to his business at the Place, kilted her

short skirts still higher, and quickened her steps homewards.

She had been "charing" at the Place all day, but her step was as brisk as if she were but beginning her work.

A quaint sturdy almost deformed little figure : thickset, with thick legs and thick features, a large battered brown hat on her head, and keen light grey eyes looking out from under it. Such was Jael Thorne, who looked neither to right nor left as she plodded along.

She followed the main road at least half a mile beyond the school. Then she turned off at an angle on to the grass, and walked between two hedges, along a sort of natural green lane. But it was deeply cut with old cart ruts, that had hardened and grown themselves over with grass. And there was a stillness as of the desert all around : neither beast, bird, nor man seemed to have their habitation there, nor was any trace of them to be seen.

But where the rough green lane ends suddenly at a hedge and a field, there is a clump of orchard-trees standing. And canopied over by these trees, so that it cannot be seen until you face it, and to the left as you go up the lane, is the tiniest of cottages, a door at one side, a tiny window at the other, and a low brown thatch reaching down to the doorway.

Even Jael has to stoop as she goes in.

"Father!" she calls from the foot of a little ladder that loses itself somewhere above in darkness, "be 'Scilla come in?"

A thin feeble voice answered in the negative.

Jael made a gesture of impatience as she began "setting the room straight."

"Hed yer cup o' tea, father?" she called up again presently.

The answer again was "No."

Jael again shrugged her high shoulders, and began to rake up the smouldering fire,

blowing upon it lustily as she leant upon her hard brown hands before it.

The door opened softly behind her and a girl came in.

“ Well, *whatever in the name of patience,*” said Jael, still resting on her hands, but looking over her shoulder while she emphasised each word, “ ’ave ye been arter *to-day?*”

“ Don’t blow ’er up, missus,” said a young man who had followed the girl into the room, and was now laying stacks of hyacinths upon the table ; “ I been and seen arter ’er and brought them flowers home for ’er. She’s on’y been in the copse agin the road, a-picking these.”

Priscilla stood smiling in the middle of the room.

“ Get some sticks, can’t ’e?” said her mother crossly, “ and don’t stand doin’ nothin’ now ye’re come.”

Priscilla went out to get some sticks.

"Don't blow her up, missus!" said the young man again pleadingly.

"Andrew, you don't know what it is," she answered, "to have a child born to you as isn't no more use than the child unborn, and to keep it and look arter it 's well, which you needn't do for the other. And me that poor, Andrew—and father a-lying up there—and some 'un must arn the livin'. And go on the parish I won't, Andrew, not if I should know the wants o' bread. It's no use flyin' in the Lord's face, I know it ain't; but I can't help a-frettin' now and again, I can't, and givin' her a bit o' my mind."

"She's very quiet and good, missus," said Andrew, after a little. The fire that was burning up showed that his face was troubled. "She's not wild like many girls that go astray and al'ays in mischief. She ain't much use in the house, I know," he said, looking down, and rubbing his foot

gently on the stones, while a sound of sadness came into his voice ; “ but she’s as innocent as any child, she is, missus ; and such pretty ways with her.”

“ Sit down and have a cup o’ tea, Andrew,” said Jael, “ now it’s made. Ye ’re a good lad to bring my gal in, and I thank ’e kindly—she’s my gal, whatever she is, and I can’t get rid o’ frettin’ and o’ carin’ for her—I wish I could. It ’ud be a deal better for me, it ’ud.”

They sat down together at the table, on which a little lamp that Jael had trimmed was burning.

Jael poured out the weak tea into four cups, and, taking one in her hand, began climbing up the steep ladder.

While her heavy foot tramped over head, Priscilla sat looking at the hyacinths.

“ ‘Scilla,” said Andrew, taking her hand tenderly, and enclosing it between his own large brown ones, “ ye’ll try and help the

mother a little with the work and that, won't you, to-morrow ? give the old gen'leman his tea and that ?”

Priscilla nodded and lisped out “ Yes.”

“ And don't stay out arter dark, 'Scilla, will you ? Ye'll remember that for the sake o' me ?”

She said yes again. But she was taking up the hyacinths and dropping them between her slender fingers all the time ; and he had little hope that she would heed him.

When Jael tramped down the ladder again Andrew had his hand still in Priscilla's on the table ; and he was looking in the girl's face with an expression that Jael never forgot.

It brought the tears into her eyes then, that she had to turn away to wipe from them before she could sit down to her well-earned meal.

Jael made a point of never staying at the

Place for a third meal when she went there as charwoman.

“ I must see if ‘Scilla’s in,” she would say to Mrs. Myse, who pressed her to remain ;
“ I don’t like her to be out arter dark.”


And that was true. But it was also true that Jael, the poor charwoman, would not touch more food than she could go without, in the house where she knew poverty had set its seal.

“ And a big house don’t go to fill ye,” she would say, “ no more than a thatched roof. Want o’ bread’s want o’ bread, wherever it is.”



CHAPTER IV.

JAEI'S STORY.

“OU'D best be goin', Andrew, though no offence," said Jael, bluntly, when she had washed up the cups, and made Priscilla arrange them in the little corner cupboard on the wall.

"Very well, missus," he answered, obediently making his way to the low door, and looking at Priscilla as he went.

"Come again, lad, whenever it takes your mind," she called after him, repenting.

"He's a good lad as ever handled spade, he

is ; and if there was more o' that sort there'd be less o' doin' wrong, and more folks a livin' as they should," and Jael sighed as she stumped about the tiny room, setting the chairs in their places, while Priscilla stood up tall and pretty by the fire, looking into it. Jael Thorne was a rough woman. Even her sigh was rough, like a gust of wind in winter. But perhaps it meant more than the sigh of most people. Certainly it meant more than the little soft child-sigh of pretty Priscilla, that said nothing more than "it is bed-time," if it said as much.

Jael had a history : that sad history that belongs to so many women of her class. She had been loved, as she thought ; plain, ungainly, and free-spoken as she was, some one had been found to love her : at least he said he loved her, and Jael, who was true, believed him. Then came the old story of the broken promise ; and after that the birth of the hapless child.

A beautiful little child ; its strange beauty almost mocking the broken-hearted ugly woman that had borne it. But that the mother had suffered and suffered terribly was shown only too soon. Priscilla with her beauty was almost witless : "simple," as the villagers in their homely way expressed it.

But Jael was happier now than she had been for many years, 'Scilla's beauty and 'Scilla's little wit had pressed sorely upon the tender heart she carried under a rough disguise. It was the Lord's judgment for her sin, she said to herself—and she did not know which she deemed the greater curse, the slow wit or the dear beauty. But now a bright hope was dawning. The beauty she had almost prayed the Lord to take away, had turned out a blessing. For did not Andrew, the best of lads, one of the two men in the parish against whom not even village slander had ever lifted a

voice—had he not been brought to look with favour on Priscilla? and Andrew's love, when he gave it, would be pure and noble, said Jael; poor Jael, whose faith in men had been so sorely shaken, who still trembled for 'Scilla every time that she went out and left her for her hard day's work.

“Get 'e to bed, 'Scilla,” she said, taking a broken candlestick with a bit of black candle in it, and lighting it at the fire: and the girl took it and began climbing the ladder. Jael kicking the embers apart with her foot, that they might die out the sooner, followed her more slowly.

One little room opened off the tiny bit of landing. Two large beds filled up nearly all the space. There was room for Priscilla to pass between them to set the flaring candle on a rickety chest of drawers.

The light fell upon the bed nearest the door, and upon the placid handsome face of

a very old man. His almost bald head was finely formed, his nose large and aquiline. His eyes, that were now sunken from age, were still keen and intelligent. He watched the women silently and happily as they moved about, just as a pleased child might do, that wakes to find the nurse or mother coming to bed at last.

Jael came up to the bed.

“Been a-sleepin’ yet, fa’der?”

“No, no—not sleepin’,” he answered, thickly.

Priscilla was sitting on the bed in which she and her mother slept. She had begun taking the handkerchief off her neck, and her fair hair had fallen to her waist.

“’Scilla!” said Jael, sharply, “put out the light before ’e undress. Grandfa’der’s wakin’. ’E *never* put the curtain up again, ’Scilla.”

Priscilla blew out the candle, and the mother and daughter groping in the dark,

took off their poor clothes, and found their way between the worn blankets, where sleep soon hushed them into forgetfulness. Past sins, Andrew, the hyacinths, the curtain, melted away in a rest that was too still and deep for dreaming.

Consciences without stain have very few of us. Lovers fewer still have. Crowded hovels and thinly covered beds are the portion of too many.

But sleep at least we all have. In this sense we are not God-forgotten, rather we are His beloved. "He giveth His beloved sleep."

Josiah Thorne, the aged, was the first in the garret to awake. He saw the first faint streak of the May dawn flushing the sky, the shiver of the morning breeze through the elm against his window. And he moved his poor stiff limbs unconsciously, thinking it was the hour for watering the horses at the old farm ; and in his dull

ears the crowing of the cock sounded, though Jael's snore did not reach him. The cows were lowing gently in the meadow; he said over their names softly to himself as he lay blinking his eyes at the growing light. Daisy, Mopsy, Green Pea, Lady—all the old names he had known so well. Was not that the master's voice calling him from the yard? Unconsciously he turned his feeble head and listened.

Then his eyes fell on the rickety chest of drawers, and the broken candlestick—and on the forms of the two women asleep on their poor bed in the corner. And Josiah Thorne remembered how it all was; that the old farm was a thing of thirty years ago, that the old master's voice would never again call him.

“And if so be as he called I couldn't go,” said the old man, shaking his head sadly, while the childish tears rushed into his

eyes, and flowed over his thin sunken cheeks.

Ninety years old ; and still there, to wake, to weep, and to remember.



CHAPTER V.

JONATHAN.



ARON FALK'S home was a picture all the year round. It stood on the rising ground opposite the Place, and looked down upon the pond and the snow-white swans, the little arched bridge where the honeysuckle and ivy tumbled in great wreaths and festoons over the clear water, as if they loved looking at their own beautiful faces, and on the great elms that studded the park.

Some of these elms looked into the water too. But they looked into it full length,

majestically, leaf for leaf mirrored on its still breast ; and between were the blue bays of sky, past which the moon went like another face, but more majestic even than the elm trees, looking not at all at herself, but having high thoughts of God.

And in May, Aaron Falk's house that looked down upon the water, wore a veil of Banksia roses, from base to roof ; clusters of the pale yellow flowers were crowded together in such profusion that the birds that had built in it earlier in the year, when only the fresh foliage was there, could hardly find their nests. And in the garden were bright patches of forget-me-not and crimson daisies, dark-faced pansies and wall-flowers. Aaron Falk was a gardener himself, and cared for all these things. He would have missed a bloom that any one had cut in his garden ; but he cut and gave away his flowers generously himself. Mrs. Myse, with her neglected, barren, weed-grown garden, could tes-

tify to this. Never a week passed from May to October, that Mr. Falk did not either take or send a bunch of flowers to the Place.

And then he had a little conservatory built on to his house. That was the pride and delight of many people in Shelbourne. For it had been built by a Shelbourne man, a young man too. If we say that the person who was most proud of it was the mother of one Jonathan, we need hardly add that Jonathan was the builder.

Jonathan himself had an honest pride in his bit of work. For it was not in his line of business, and yet it was conceded that he had made "a rare job of it." But then Jonathan did most things well, he had the knack of hitting the right nail on the head.

And still he was not a rising man. Shelbourne was not a place to rise in. And Jonathan stayed on in Shelbourne.

It was to his home that Andrew turned in, when he reached the village that even-

ing, after seeing Priscilla safely housed and restored to her mother. It was a weight off his mind every time that he saw her safe at home.

“Is Jonathan in, if you please, missus?” he asked, looking in at the door.

A meek little woman of between fifty and sixty was sitting sewing at the table, mending a corduroy coat.

She looked up with a gentle smile when she saw Andrew, and answered, “You must come a little nigher, Andrew; I’m terrible dull o’ hearing to-night.”

Then guessing at what he wanted she said,

“Jonathan’s not at home, but I think you’ll meet him if you go by the school; he was to do somethin’ for schoolmaster, I take it, somethin’ in the garden, or that. It’s there you’ll happen on him, Andrew.”

Her voice and face were so patient and sweet as she looked up and spoke, one

could hardly tell which was the sweetest. A small, regular face it was, the grey hair smoothed down on each side of a rather wide forehead, a straight small nose, a straight sweet mouth, and grey eyes set rather far apart, that carried with them a look of such mixed truth and tenderness as it is difficult to describe, such was Jonathan's mother.

Bent over the fire was a small thin man, with a very hard pale face. He kept his slouch hat on, and was stretching his hands over the flame.

"He's always cold, he is," said his wife, looking at him compassionately. He took no notice, but if anything the hard mouth closed a little tighter, as if he hated pity.

"I'll be goin' arter Jonathan then," said Andrew; "good-night, missus."

"Good-night, Andrew."

The door closed, and Andrew's steps died in the distance.

"Do you feel sadly, Jonathan?" asked the wife presently, looking up anxiously from the corduroy jacket before her, and passing her hand over her tired eyes, from which she had taken her spectacles.

The man moved his foot impatiently, changed his attitude and rested his chin on his hand, while he still stared into the fire. He made some sort of sound, but it did not reach the dull ears of his wife.

She was used to it. She only rubbed her spectacles with the corner of her apron, snuffed the candle, and drew it a little nearer, blinked a little at the bright light, then sighed, and went on patching at her son's jacket.

Andrew, going further up the village, turned in at Mr. Byles's gate. Jonathan was working there in the twilight.

"What are you arter?" asked Andrew.

"Mr. Byles asked me to see after these roses," said Jonathan; "it's by half too

late now, but I ought to have thought o' them before."

"He won't live to see 'em bloom, not he," said Andrew.

"Well, if he don't some one will. It's a pity a rose shouldn't be a rose, isn't it?"

"I don't know nothin' about such things," answered his friend. "And I'd like it better if so be as you hadn't so much o' such jobs to do. You could do better with your time, you could."

Jonathan went on working; after a while he said,

"Have you been arter anything to-night? or have you been idling, eh?"

If it had not been too dark Andrew would have seen a quiet twinkle in Jonathan's eye. He was sure it was there, and he resented it as much as he could resent anything Jonathan said or did.

"That's my business, not your'n."

"But you found fault with *my* business," Jonathan answered good-naturedly.

"It ain't your business. If it was, I'd be the last to speak agin it. I finds fault because you're contrairy like, always goin' agin your luck. You're coming home and stoppin' here and that—it's all o' one piece."

By this time Jonathan had done his work, and was walking down the road with Andrew. He never answered in a hurry; he was never easily roused when he himself was attacked or made the subject of discussion. But he said, after a few minutes—

"I've never repented comin' home, that I know of."

"I know you've been dull by reason of it many a time," said Andrew.

"May be," said Jonathan; "that's a different thing."

Andrew said he could not understand

that. Jonathan did not try to explain it to him, being a man of very few words, as we have said, where he himself was concerned.

But I think they both saw and understood quite plainly what has been called of late Christ's Secret. We are all called upon sooner or later to understand it ; but some are more backward than others in answering to the call.

Jonathan walked home with his friend, as they had done together many and many nights, ever since they had been school lads smarting under Mr. Byles's cane.

The Place glimmered white through the elm trees—the light in Mr. Falk's kitchen and parlour windows burnt bright at the end of the village, just as they had done these many years. But to the young men change had come. One had learnt the secret of self-renouncement. In the heart

of the other had grown up a deep, strong love.

And though they were friends, and though they walked and talked together, neither of them spoke quite openly of these changes. Each wondered at the other, and each forbore to give the other pain.

Perhaps the wonder that Jonathan felt at Andrew's love for witless Priscilla, was exceeded by Andrew's wonder at the love of Jonathan for his father, when they reached his home, and the sweet little grey mother opening the door at the sound of their footsteps, showed the pale hard-featured man still cowering dumbly over the fire, without a look or word of greeting for his son.

It was for this, was it, that the prosperous, ambitious mechanic, Jonathan Cleare, had given up all his chances of fame and fortune, after a two years' absence from Shelbourne, and returned to the old hum-

ble home and anvil, and the old humdrum
village life ?

No wonder if Jonathan sometimes looked
“dull,” as Andrew said.



CHAPTER VI.

MR. BYLES'S WASHING DAY.

T was a very humdrum life in Shelbourne certainly, in spite of its beauty. But then the very seasons to some are humdrum, and to such existence must be monotonous anywhere.

The simple village folk are wise, however. Without knowing it they have attained to the true philosophy of life, and of the Bible. In whatsoever state they are called they are for the most part therewith content. Sometimes they are too content, so long they have been schooled in the school of adver-

sity ; it would be well if we could raise them to a discontent with some of the unnecessary and degrading hardships they suffer. When a man comes to lie down peacefully eleven in a room, it speaks of something less admirable than resignation.

And after all, monotony like happiness is relative. May-day, Guy Fawkes' day, the giving out of the Coal Club, were as exciting events in Shelbourne, as Ascot, or the opening of Parliament to the great world.

Mr. May, Mrs. Myse, Mr. Falk, Mr. Byles, were great magnates, whose movements must always afford material for conversation, and Mr. Byles's health was at this time in that state of uncertainty which keeps the public mind in an attitude of pleasing suspense.

"He can't live not long, poor dear."
"He's very near his account, he is." "I

count he won't see Michaelmas." Such were the conjectures that had been made over the poor schoolmaster's head for many years. But hitherto nothing had happened ; village life like the seasons had slipped monotonously by.

But the patient procession of the seasons is the monotony of perfect rhythm, and village hearts as well as others beat, though unconsciously, to the beautiful cadence.

Jael thought June very beautiful, when May had slipped by, and she saw the roses in Mr. Falk's garden peeping over the hedge, sunning themselves on the wall, rambling over the pillars at the Place, and with the simple maidenly faces of the dog-rose kind, looking even out of the high hedges of the lane leading to her quaint little home.

She thought July beautiful, too, when the trees bent under the weight of foliage, and the sky was cloudlessly blue, and

Jonathan's garden on a small, and Aaron Falk's on a large scale, blazed with summer flowers, at the height of their beauty. Jonathan's garden was always a daughter of Mr. Falk's garden : for all the flowers that were to spare, the brewer made over to Jonathan ; and the sweet little grey mother Mrs. Cleare looked out at them, and felt happy. It had been a great blessing to her getting her son home ; yet she often cried thinking of it, and of all he had given up for the sake of his father and her.

It was as beautiful a day as ever Jael had seen, one early August morning, when giving her father his breakfast, she was off betimes to Mr. Byles's to wash.

Mr. Byles hated women. But he needed clean linen like other men, and washed his linen must be. Mr. Byles had an expedient, however, for getting rid of

washing and women as fast as possible. He got the two handiest, hardest-working women in the parish, and gave them two days at it every fortnight. These two women were Jael Thorne and Andrew's mother, Martha Male.

So it was to meet her colleague that Jael went forth this fine August morning, and if ever Mr. Byles had made a good hit in his life, he did it when he chose his washer-women.

Out with the soap, up with the sleeves, out with the wash trays, on with the great kettle—it was all in train in a moment. Then they planted themselves opposite each other. Jael short, wiry, and sunburnt, the old battered brown hat upon her head, with its faded pink ribbon, the short full brown skirt on her ample waist, and the great faded apron over it. A pair of wiry brown hands and arms were in the soap suds, and Mr. Byles's shirts were bobbing up and

down, swelling out in a balloon in the steam, and being kneaded, beaten, suppressed continually.

Then came the second pair of arms. But not brown and small. Large, plump, white and strong, the spotless sleeves of the spotless print gown turned up and pinned at the shoulders. A neat handkerchief round her ample throat, a hat like Jael's, but black, neat, in thoroughly good repair, trimmed with a neat purple ribbon : everything exquisitely clean and trim : such was Martha Male, Andrew's mother. The story of the two women was written in their persons, if not in their faces ; but I think it was there as well. Jael, the fallen, ill-used girl of long ago, grown up to the fight of life and for daily bread, without anyone to depend on, though two depended on her, without anyone to look clean and smart for, without any respected husband's name to fall back upon, to be proud of; and with-

out the means of making herself more than cleanly ragged, if she wished it. Martha Male, the healthy, comfortable matron, with a husband comfortably in work, a steady, hard-working son, and two well-married daughters—surely the difference was written in the plump, kind face, as she too fell to pummelling Mr. Byles's linen.

Swish, swish, bang, bang—more soap, more suds, more water—then the crying of the squeezed linen as Mrs. Male's powerful hands wrung it, and the little trickles of water fell on the froth of suds and made holes in it, like the rain on snow in thaw.

"Proper dirty *this* is," said Jael, holding up a duster and looking at it fiercely from a professional point of view.

"Mostly is, is dusters," said Mrs. Male laconically.

"It 'ud be bad days for such as me if folks didn't make a muck o' things o'

times," said Jael, having at the duster again hotly.

The great kettle again : more hot water, and clouds of steam. Then a foot, slow and shuffling, was heard in the upper room.

"Mr. Byles, that's he," said Mrs. Male. There being no one else in the house, this was too self-evident a proposition to require any reply. Sundry coughings and dismal wheezings followed, quite confirming the identity of the person in question.

"We won't have *this* job long, I take it," said Jael, shaking her head over a refractory shirt that refused to take the wet all over, and started up obstreperously into air balloons.

Martha Male laid down the piece of soap she had been diving for for some seconds, and forgetting herself so far as to wipe her hands on her clean Hessing apron, she stared at Jael with an expression of awe and terror.

"Whatever in the name o' goodness is it?" asked Jael.

Martha Male pointed with her plump forefinger at the wet piece of soap, while she kept the other hand rolled in her apron.

"Jael Thorne," she said solemnly, "if somethink doesn't happen what's bad and unlucky, I'm a worse woman than I thought. That's three times as that very partic'lar piece of soap's slipped through my hands this blessed mornin'; and if nothin' doesn't come o' that, I'm—"

Mr. Byles coughed in the next room, and Mrs. Male stopping short, wagged her head knowingly at Jael, as much as to say, "I told you!"

"That means you ought to be *sent for*, you've al'ays told *me*," said her colleague, who was matter of fact, very. "And if it's Mr. Byles as anythink's to come to, you won't be sent for, by reason there ain't no-

body to send, nor yet no occasion for sendin'. Because if I sees right, as I take it I do, you're here large as life, and all ready."

"It's all very well for you to be s' saucy," said Mrs. Male, shaking her head and looking hurt and dignified. "Wet soap never slipped *with me*, as somethink didn't come of it. I wouldn't give half a sovereign, in shillin's and sixpences for Mr. Byles's life, not arter this."

"Please yourself," said Jael; "no one won't ask you, that's sartin. If some folks could change with some other folks it 'ud be a deal better for some."

This favourite conclusion of Jael's had such a roll of rhetoric about it, it always silenced Martha Male.



CHAPTER VII.

AN EVENT AT LAST.



MARTHA MALE and Jael were sitting down to "lunch" at eleven o'clock, in Mr. Byles's kitchen, with white boiled hands, and large appetites, when a loud rap was heard at the door.

"Whatever in the name o' goodness,"—began Jael.

Martha Male, turning a little white, still had presence of mind to wag her head again, as much as to say "*I told you !*"

Poor woman, in another moment it was more than a superstitious fear that paled

her cheeks. The sick heart-faintness of evil tidings had come to her ; and smitten in an instant by the mysterious power that, laying its hand upon the soul, unnerves the body, she was leaning, white and trembling, upon Jael's shoulder.

"O Jael, Jael, what *shall* I do?" she moaned, while about the door a group of women had gathered, and the news went to and fro like wild-fire that Andrew had "got a mischief."

"Poor dear!" said Jael, "take this beer 'cause you've not tasted nothin', and then come and see ar'ter him."

She roused herself at the thought of being of use to her boy, and followed Jael with trembling hurried steps, out of the house.

"Poor dear!" said the women, as she passed them, one or two wiping their eyes, some holding their babies, and staring at her, but all feeling sorry for her in their own way.

"He's in Jonathan Cleare's house," said one woman to Jael, "they've took him there."

"Oh, I think he *did* look bad," said one.

"He don't look like ever comin' round agin'," said another.

"That's just the way my boy Tom went," said a third. "He got a mischief, and were gone afore mornin', wern't he, Mary?"

Mr. May was very quickly at the Cleares' house. He was always sent for in times of trouble. Behind him more slowly came Mrs. Myse, who had had to put on her old black bonnet and thin cloak, before coming out.

"This is a bad job," he said to the group of gossips at the gate.

"That it is, sir," said a chorus of voices. "We all know it is bad to come by a mischief, it is. He did look proper bad, did Andrew. He ain't like to get by it, I count."

Mr. May was used to the dismal tone of the Shelbourne public on such occasions, and went into the cottage without any great misgivings.

It is always a sad thing to see a young strong man struck down by suffering, and become in an instant as helpless as a child. It was very sad to see honest Andrew flat on his back, on Jonathan's bed, the tears streaming down his cheeks from sheer bodily pain, and his poor mother crying beside him, while they waited for the doctor. Jonathan was going for him.

Mr. May thought it would be much better to send Andrew to the hospital. They could get him to Hephreth in half the time they would have to wait for a doctor to come from there; and Andrew thought it would be better too, knowing that his mother had very little nerve or self-control for all she was "so big and lusty," as folk said.

So Mr. Falk lent a horse, and a neighbouring farmer a cart, and Jonathan and Mr. May laid a mattress in it.

Then Jonathan came up to his bed, on which Andrew was lying, and said—

“Can you bear for me to lift you, ’Drew, lad?”

Andrew lifted his honest eyes beseechingly to Jonathan’s face. The look said—
“Don’t hurt me, Jonathan—I’m quite in your power.” He didn’t say anything, but his lips quivered.

Jonathan put his strong arms under his friend, and carried him as tenderly as if he had been a little child. Mr. May walked in front, supporting the leg that was broken.

Then several men lifted him into the cart, and Mrs. Myse and the village nurse put a pillow under his head, and a wet handkerchief on his heated forehead.

Poor Mrs. Male, trembling and useless, must still go with him.

“And so I'd best go with *her*,” said Jael, pulling her sleeves down, and flinging the great tears from her eyes ; next to 'Scilla and her father, there was no one she loved so well as Andrew.

But Mrs. Male fainted before she got into the cart, and had to be carried back to the house, so there was no need for Jael, and Jonathan alone undertook the charge of Andrew.

He opened a great umbrella, and hoisting himself on the edge of the cart, held it over Andrew all the way, while he drove.

Now and then he replaced the wet cloth on his forehead ; once, when he got near the hospital, he dried the tears off Andrew's face.

“Thank you, Jonathan,” he said feebly.

There was more difficulty in getting Andrew out than in lifting him into the cart ; for the hospital had a yard, and big

gates, and no one was near who could help Jonathan.

It was then, when on moving his friend gently Andrew opened his tearful eyes again and moaned, that Jonathan's heart failed him.

He turned away.

Afterwards, plucking up his courage he went back, lifted Andrew, mattress and all, and laid him inside the gates.

And then help came; but when they had got into the large ward, with flowers on the table and the strong smell of disinfectants and soap in the air, the surgeon saw that the big dark man who had brought in the patient was almost as much in need of brandy as was Andrew.

But he recovered very quickly. And it was he who helped the nurse and surgeon to undress Andrew, and who stood beside him while the leg was set.

"He'll want a change of linen. I sup-

pose you forgot that," said the kind motherly nurse.

"I've just thought upon it," said Jonathan. "I'll bring them back to-night."

"It's a long way for you," said the nurse. "But you had better take these with you."

She made his clothes into a bundle, tied them in a cloth, and gave them to Jonathan.

"You're a bit easier now?" he asked before he turned to go, looking concernedly at his friend's white face and closed eyes. "Is there anything I can say to any of them?"

"Tell mother I'll be better soon, and let 'Sc——"

"Yes, I'll let 'Scilla know," said Jonathan; and went out on tip-toe on his hob-nails, with the bundle under his arm.



CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT PRISCILLA SAID.



ONATHAN got out of the cart at the Males' door.

"I left him comfortable, as far as he could be," said he to tearful Mrs. Male. "They'd set the leg and that, and put it in a cradle. The doctor says that he must have pain for a while, but that's no wonder."

"Oh, Jonathan, my boy," said Martha, holding her hands over her massive person, "I'm all of a-totter and a-tremble. I think I did feel bad when they come to

tell me ; but when I come in over the door and see the dear poor creature a-lyin' there on that there bed o' yourn, I thought that die I must. It took me so here," she went on holding her heart, "I never thought that live I could."

"You'd best think o' sayin' a word o' thanks to Jonathan, as has fetched him to the hospital," suggested her husband, who was dry-eyed, but very troubled and anxious, walking up and down the little room.

"But dearie me, Abraham," said his wife, "it's very well for you to take it so easy, but if you'd have been in my shoes, terrified and come over *you'd* have been too. To see Andrew a-lyin'—and them poor trousers o' his as I mended last week, all torn to rags about the knee where the horse kicked him, and that stained with blood you'd have thought his nose had bled at the worst it ever is—and to see his

shirt as Jonathan fetched home—" And as she began opening the parcel she broke off into a violent fit of weeping.

Abraham Male got up, opened a drawer, and put the clothes into it. He shut it again decisively, and placed the kettle on the fire, settling it sturdily between the sticks.

Jonathan helped him to rake up the coals into a flame.

"There's nothin' like a cup o' tea for them women," said Mr. Male, under cover of his wife's sobs. "It sets them on their legs agin. It's wonderful."

Abraham, who had been sent for to hear the bad tidings of his son's accident, was too late to see him start for the hospital; but he was too much troubled to go back again to his work, and he did not like to leave his wife in such misery.

"I'd go in to see the boy and willin', and take his change o' clothes," he said to

Jonathan ; "but I don't like for to leave the missus, she do take on so."

"And I'm a better man than you, Male," said Jonathan, watching Mrs. Male while she tied up the clean clothes in a red handkerchief and knotted the ends together.

"And you'll have to walk all the way, Jonathan !" she said. The cup of tea had made her much better, and her kind heart was full of gratitude.

"That's easy done, missus," he said ; and wishing them good-afternoon, he went out of the house.

"You'll call in when you come back ?" Martha shouted after him : and her voice had returned to its natural tone.

"Trust Jonathan for that," said Abraham, eating his bread and butter, and sipping his colourless tea at the table.

Mrs. Male was watching the man that was so soon to set eyes on Andrew, from the window.

“ Gracious me, whatever makes him take that road ? He ain’t a-goin’ straight toward Hepreth.”

Jonathan, as Abraham said, knew his business. He was taking a short cut to Josiah Thorne’s house, or rather to the long lane which was the only path to it.

He had not forgotten his promise to Andrew. Priscilla might be at home ; it was not likely, but he would give it the chance : and then it would please ’Drew to hear about her.

“ Would she care ? ” asked Jonathan as he trudged along. He very much doubted it. He had never seen any love on ’Scilla’s side ; if there had been more ground for it he would sometimes have feared some one else had stolen her love—if she had any.

There was here and there a yellow leaf in the high hedges that threw their tall shadow over the ruddy green lane, and here and there a red May-berry. The sun

was already sloping towards the west, behind the steeple of Shelbourne Church. Now and then, with a whirr, the squire's partridges rose in the fields on either side the lane, disturbed by the unwonted sound of footsteps.

Jonathan wondered, as he drew near the little orchard where he knew the Thornes' home was buried, and saw the brambles climbing over the apple-trees, the bindweed and bryony tangled together over the broken fence, and the gate half off its hinges, looking out tipsily into the lane, how the tenants of such a place and Andrew should have anything in common. He wondered on, when he saw Jael's torn skirt hanging on the wall opposite the little crooked window, and thought of Jael as he had seen her this morning, in the battered brown hat, with the brown face and keen eyes looking out under it. Not that he despised Jael; he had a very warm

corner in his heart for her, for he pitied, and in many ways he could not help respecting her. Mr. May would have told you the same about Jael, any day.

But order and neatness and comfort were the prevailing features in Andrew's home. Everything was respectable and respected, and in a simple way just as it should be.

Here everything was chaos and disorder. Sometimes the rooms were swept, sometimes they were not. It depended upon whether Jael was busy or not. Priscilla tried to clear up sometimes, but she did not seem fitted for it. She herself always looked clean and pretty, but her hands were too white and long for scrubbing and such coarse work. It was whispered that Priscilla's father had gentle blood in him ; and it needed something to account for her beauty and refinement, when compared with the other village girls. But of this

Priscilla herself knew nothing. To her strange childish mind it had never occurred that her mother bore her maiden name, and never spoke of her father. And there was the less wonder, since Jael was always called "Jael" and nothing more.

It was well known that if there was anything that Jael wished to guard against, it was this, that Priscilla should ever learn the story of her birth.

And Jael, though she was plain spoken, had made no enemies. Few cared to speak much to Priscilla, though all liked to look at her. They thought her too witless to be much noticed. And fewer still would have wished to tell her her mother's story.

Shelbourne in this respect had a much higher tone than many parishes. Morality, alas! is too often ruled by custom; and it was not common in Shelbourne for girls to lose their good name.

And Jael, the poor plain girl, who had

sinned so many years ago, was more anxious over her beautiful child than many a sober respected matron.

Many nights she lay awake thinking of what would happen to Priscilla if she died first. "Maybe it's because I've been so near the devil myself," she would say sometimes to a neighbour, "I don't like to think o' any one as belongs to me, or doesn't belong neither, a-goin' that road."

To Jonathan's surprise Priscilla was at home. Most days she spent wandering about in the lanes or copses, but to-day she was seated on her grandfather's bed, talking to him now and then, when he spoke to her.

Jonathan climbed the ladder.

The old man's blue eyes were fixed on him directly.

"I've got company to-day," he said in his thick feeble way.

"Yes, so I see. You aren't often at home, 'Scilla, are you?"

She looked down, and said "No."

Jonathan noticed she was pale. Perhaps she had heard about Andrew, and was sorry.

Yes, she had heard. And she looked up and said, "I'm very sorry."

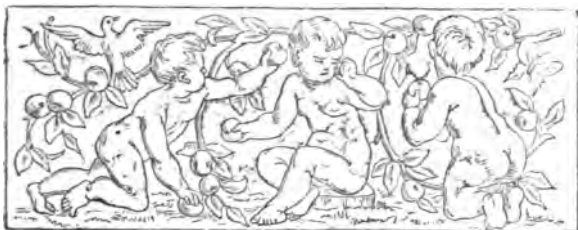
Jonathan trudged joyfully on to Hepreth, and more partridges whirred up in the fields, and several men passed whistling. Jonathan whistled a little too, though only that morning Andrew had "got the mischief." Everything looked happier and brighter: perhaps it was partly the reaction that always follows on any strain of anxiety or trouble; but it was also that now Jonathan could say in all truth to his David,

"I've seen Priscilla, and I've told her about you. And she looked down-hearted, 'Drew. I think she's sorry about you."

David's eyes were quite dry when Jonathan went into the ward. At least they looked so to the nurse, who was talking to

him. But to Jonathan they looked brim full of tears ; and after he had given hi message, there could be no doubt about it. They overflowed and rolled hotly on to the pillow.

And Jonathan would have liked to have dried them ; but folk were looking on, so he could not.



CHAPTER IX.

HOME FROM HEPRETH.

T was dark before Jonathan got home again. He whistled to himself cheerily all the way back. A happy conscience carries a man along bravely, and Jonathan's heart was lighter than usual, for all he was forced to leave his mate behind him in the hospital. Perhaps it was still partly the reaction that comes as certainly after trouble as sunshine after storm ; but he did not disguise from himself that a selfish pleasure was now mixed with his feeling of ease. In Hepreth

he had met an engineer of the name of Wanklin, whose acquaintance Jonathan had made in the prosperous days of his ambition and absence from home. The successful man in broad cloth and tall hat had spoken very kindly to him, for all his work-a-day clothes: he had taken him into the Blue Dragon (to the parlour too, not the tap), had treated him to sherry, which Jonathan drank for the honour of the thing rather than the pleasure, wishing all the time it had been beer—and over the sherry and breaking of biscuits under Mr. Wanklin's ringed hand, Jonathan had been asked by the great man to come to his assistance and undertake a job that needed more intelligence and neater fingers than Mr. Wanklin could command among his men.

“It wouldn't be a long job, I see, sir,” said Jonathan, when the engineer had explained what he required. “And I think I could manage it easily. I'd come to-mor-

row fortnight if there's a coach your way, and I think I could manage to leave my work for a fortnight or more, to oblige you."

"To oblige me, oh! you humbug, you," said Mr. Wanklin—"as if your fingers don't itch for the old tools, eh?"

He did long for the old work; sometimes a craving for it came upon him. He half wondered whether he should be right even in tasting the forbidden fruit. But he reasoned with himself that he had mastered himself before, and that he would master himself again. Work at the forge had been terribly slack of late, and such jobs as might fall in in his absence his apprentice could undertake. And his mother should not lose by it—how could she? No one knew better than he how ill the blacksmith's work was paid, how well the work he was to undertake. And so he went home happy.

He had not long to wait for Andrew's

mother to open the door. She had been listening for footsteps for an hour gone by.

Jonathan had good news to give. Andrew was not so "dull," he said. He had cheered up, and said he should soon get well and come home again. Mother was not to fret, but to thank the Lord it hadn't been a deal worse.

Mrs. Male only had a few quiet tears of gratitude to wipe away now.

"But oh, Jonathan," she said, "what'll the damage be? you've lost a whole day's work."

"Nothin', missus, nothin'," said Jonathan, turning away.

And then came an ominous sound from the chimney corner where Abraham Male was sitting, as he brushed his coat sleeve across his face.

As Jonathan went home he met Mr. Falk, who had been up to the school-master's house.

“Good-evening, sir,” said Jonathan. He expected Mr. Falk to ask after Andrew.

“Good-evening, Jonathan. I wish you’d come up to my place when you’ve an idle half-hour. I want to ask you about the stove in that greenhouse. It don’t act, and we may be expecting frosts next month, at least the month after—this is the last day of August, I think.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll look in on Friday. I’ve got a job in the church that morning, so it’ll be handy. We’re much obliged to you, sir, for the loan of the mare. We got Andrew in comfortable.”

“Oh, quite welcome,” said Mr. Falk, hurriedly. Perhaps like Jonathan he disliked being thanked.

As Jonathan turned in at his own gate he looked at the bright lights in Mr. Falk’s windows; he could see the leaping of the flame in the parlour through the trees and the big gates. He could not help a feeling of

envy springing into his heart. If things had been otherwise with him, if his father had not lost his health and his work, such a home as that might have been Jonathan's. Golden prospects had opened before the young mechanic : high wages, a good position, everything that raises the ambition in the man had been in his grasp. And now,—it was so different.

He opened the door and saw the mother patching at his corduroy coat. There was a mess of greens and potatoes on the hearth, and a slice of cold pork on the table, ready for his supper. And Jonathan the elder, in the slouch hat, was bending as usual over the fire, white and silent, with compressed lips.

Jonathan gave a sigh as he sat down to his poor supper : and yet no one cared less for what he ate. But he did not sigh again. He could not grudge anything to Mr. Falk who had always been so open-

handed and pleasant with him. And then he fell to talking with his mother about his work for Mr. Franklin, and about Andrew. She received the former news with unfeigned delight, though her face fell when she heard he might be away a fortnight.

"I've got a nice bit o' beet I *wish* as I had sent along with you to 'Drew," she said presently. "But you'll likely be goin' agin, Jonathan, from Shimbleford?"

Jonathan smiled.

"I don't think they'll let him have the beet, mother. But I'll be going again."

"His father's agoin' We'n'sday," said Mrs. Cleare; "so they tell me. But I'm so dull o' hearin', I'm afeard to repeat anythink as they says," she added gently.

"I'll go on my way through Hepreth," said Jonathan, slicing at the cold pork, and eating with such appetite that his mother rejoiced behind her spectacles.

Jonathan the elder drew in his chair and took some supper too. This rejoiced his wife more than ever. But she stitched away with turned-down eyes, and her firm sweet mouth betrayed nothing. She had little or no influence with her husband, but she had not lived with him thirty years and learnt nothing.

“I think yer father *did* eat a nice bit o’ supper to-night, Jonathan,” she said, when he had gone to bed without a good-night to either of them. “But it don’t do for me to make no count of it ; it ’ud set him off his food at once.”

“How’s he been keeping to-day?” asked his son.

“I don’t think he’s been other than sadly. He don’t say nothink—he’s sich a *close* man. But Becky’s been in, and she told me she’d heered him a-moanin’ to hisself in the garden. I don’t see as he gits no better, Jonathan, I don’t.”

She looked very sad for a few moments ; but with that quiet sadness that some women carry with such grace. Most of us rebel at trouble; but there are some who have companied with grief so long it has become part of their nature, and the struggle has long since ceased. There are a great many saints and martyrs in villages, as in history and in convents, who wear this look. There was one who wore it in Shelbourne, and that was Mrs. Cleare.

Next day Mrs. Myse, calling to see Martha Male, found her much comforted. She was washing Andrew's clothes, and taking a sad pleasure in it. She had his sock pulled lovingly over her hand, as she stood by the wash tray.

"Them's the very socks as ever he had on," she said, shaking her head over them.

"It was good he had such a friend as Jonathan," said Mrs. Myse.

"Yes, ye see, ma'am, they've allus been

mates. They've been wonderfully ar'ter each other since ever they were lads at the school. Mr. Byles he knows that. And Andrew 'd do the same for Jonathan any day—that he would, I'm sure. I knew as somethink were a-going to come to 'Drew," said Mrs. Male, her superstitious imagination carrying her a little away from the truth. "Soap never slipped with *me* as somethink didn't come of it. Dearie me, I hope it won't slip not agin' to-day. But there's a sayin' as troubles never come single."

Mr. May joined his aunt, and they went up to Josiah Thorne's together.

"It's a long time since I have seen the poor old man," said Mrs. Myse, stepping along, gallantly, beside her thin, tall nephew, in his black alpaca coat, girding up her neat little black-brown dress, and showing a pair of flat cloth boots, with goloshes pulled over them. Her face was always thin and

sallow, his face was thin enough too. Mr. Peel, the butcher, was quite sure Mr. May and Mrs. Myse did not buy enough meat, and there were many people in Shelbourne who agreed with him. Some people thought they had hardly enough to wear. But all weathers saw them trotting about together in the parish, the tall, lean, sweet-faced nephew in alpaca, the short, sallow, sickly little aunt in goloshes.

This was the one point in which Mrs. Myse was guilty of taking care of herself. The instinct of self-preservation must come out somewhere, with the most unselfish of us : it came out in Mrs. Myse in goloshes.

The time had been when neither clergyman nor neighbour cared to go and see Josiah Thorne and his daughter.

They had always been a strange lot, strange in their ways and looks. The little house they lived in now had been pulled down by Josiah and his father, and moved

brick for brick, to be built up again in the heart of the little green orchard at the end of that out-of-the-way lane. They built it together without help ; hence the ladder, which served them as a staircase, and the simplicity of the arrangements altogether, the crooked fire-place, the crooked windows, and half-a-dozen other crooked things.

And when it was built Josiah did not want to have much to do with neighbours. After Jael's sad story he shut himself up more than ever. It was easy to do, seeing how far he was from the village, and how rutty the lane was. Neighbours used to say they saw him squatting all day in the orchard with an old gun, shooting rooks or squirrels. Mrs. Myse herself had seen Jael up an apple tree, throwing the apples into Priscilla's lap, when, as a little girl, she was told to stand there, and hold out her apron. But Mr. May and old age had softened the old man's heart, if it needed softening. He

allowed "the minister" to come and see him now, and liked to hear him read.

Especially he liked the story of the Saviour's sufferings, though it was almost too much for him.

"I can't make out how they could do such queer things!" he would burst out, when he heard of the insults offered by the soldiers ; and he wept like a little child.

Very child-like he was as he lay there, ignorant, simple, and full of a quiet, unwavering faith—his dull ears straining to hear what Mr. May read.

"Oh no, we oughtn't to fret, we oughtn't. Look how He suffered, look all they put Him to—and yet He existed 'em all ! I've had a deal o' trouble, I've had, i' my time, but the Lord He helped me through. I can't see as well as I used to could, but I sees the angels sometimes of a night, a-goin' up and a-goin' down—beautiful—past the winder."

"Where's Priscilla?" asked Mrs. Myse, when the reading was over, looking round the room.

"She ain't never here, my lady—scarcely never. She likes gaddin' about best. She's allus arter flowers, and sich like i' the cospes. I don't blame her, I don't; it's very nice, it is, to be i' the fresh air. I forgits how he smelt now, it's so long sin' I been out in him. But he had a sweet smell—he smelt beautiful, he did, o' mornings, when I were with the stock. And it makes yo' feel warm like and comfor'ble when ye gits in." And he pulled the poor thin blanket up to his sharp chin and shivered. His blood was beginning to course very slowly at ninety years of age.

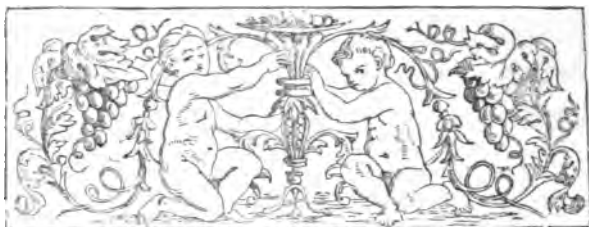
"What a pity it is that that poor child Priscilla can't do more for him," said Mrs. Myse, as they went home. "I don't like her way of wandering about all day, and everywhere, alone. It would break

Jael's heart if anything happened to her."

"The pity is," her nephew answered, "that that fine fellow, Andrew, cares for her. I don't know that she is otherwise than a good, quiet girl, but she's not over wise; it's a bad world we live in, and she has no one to look after her, poor child."

"And such a face!" said Mrs. Myse—"it is the face of an angel!"

"Only a beautiful woman's, I think, aunt," said the curate.



CHAPTER X.

FOREBODINGS.



HEY had not gone many hundred yards before they came on the beautiful face of which they had spoken. 'Scilla was coming slowly homewards, without noticing them. Something of dejection in her air could not fail to be noticed both by the curate and his aunt. The beautiful head she carried so well, like a "princess," as the village people used to say, was bent like the face of a drooping flower, and instead of the armful of flowers or tinted leaves she delighted in, she was

returning empty handed, her long fingers crossed listlessly before her. It was not till Mrs. Myse spoke to her that she looked up. Then she did so with a startled, bewildered look, half frightened and half absent.

She hardly answered Mrs. Myse's greeting, but hurried past them.

"Dear Alfred, I yield to your opinion—it is only a beautiful woman's face after all, for I see she has been crying, and I suppose angels never cry. Poor child—perhaps she feels Andrew's accident and absence."

"I never fancied she cared at all about him," said the curate.

"I never thought so either. But there is no saying. Young girls sometimes don't know their own minds, till Providence makes them up for them."

Mr. May smiled; but his aunt looked grave in spite of her happy prognostications. Some dim foreboding that all was not well

crept upon her as she recalled 'Scilla's woe-begone look : it hardly seemed to her the April-sorrow that Andrew's accident might have caused the girl he loved.

How long she might have pursued her gloomy fancy is uncertain ; but it was chased away by a meeting with Aaron Falk, who suddenly emerged through a gap in the hedge and joined them. With a bright colour in his pleasant face, and a more than usual vivacity in his manner, he was no unwelcome companion of their homeward walk. A ready talker he had always been, but to-day his conversation flowed ceaselessly. The weather, the crops, the burials bill, the rates, the last railway accident—he flitted from one to the other with extraordinary zest. Mrs. Myse, who had it on her lips when she met him, to say something about 'Scilla's tear-stained eyes, of which her mind could not disburden itself, had the subject forced from it in spite of

herself. Mr. Falk, she said to herself as she took off her bonnet, was always agreeable ; but this afternoon he had excelled himself.

And in the meantime the subject of her less happy thoughts was making her way toward her cottage. But she did not enter it ; she stood outside the little gate leaning her arms on the broken paling and looking at the grey beards of lichen on the orchard trees. Now and then she raised her hand to her throat and slipped her fingers under the collar of her dress, as if looking for something. She did not find it ; for the tears welled up again into the blue eyes, and her pink pouting lips quivered. Here and there, when she moved her dress, a pink dimple appeared, as if beads had been there, and left their impression. No beads were there now. She had lost them ; and they were so pretty.

Why had they been taken away from her ? She had never shown them to any-

one, never told anyone who had given them to her. Even her mother had never seen them, never dreamt of them. 'Scilla had been told never to show those beads, and she had obeyed implicitly. Every night, for many months, the pink string had been slipped into her pocket, and only tied on again when she was out in the wood, alone with her flowers, and her childish thoughts.

Her pillow was wet that night from a few hot tears. Were they all for the beads, whose last trace on her white neck had now faded away for ever, or was there a heavier sorrow in the poor simple heart, a foreboding such as Mrs. Myse had been conscious of when the girl passed her, that some weightier distress and trouble was in store ?

She stole out in the morning red-eyed and weary, as soon as her mother had risen and busied herself about the house. A regular breakfast was a rare thing in that

poor home; 'Scilla had taken a piece of bread and gone to her wild flowers.

She stayed with them all the day in the silent woods, from which they were fast fading to make way for the brighter tints of approaching autumn, and came home only when the sun had set, and the cottage sat in gloom under its orchard trees.

Then she came in softly, took the cat upon her knees, and stroked it till her mother told her it was time for bed.

Jael Thorne went more than usual to the Place at this time; but though she was out all the day her heart was less anxious, for 'Scilla did not wander so much now; she always found her at home on her return.

"I think she must have had a sly hope of making that good lad Andrew come out and look for her, Jael," said Mrs. May saucily, when Jael told her of her girl's altered ways. "I think she has given *away* her

little *heart* to him," she went on, looking at Jael to see if her face would throw any light on the subject, since her words were always few. "I can't help thinking so, she had certainly been *crying* when I met her one day just after his accident."

Jael was rubbing a table in the large empty hall, her back turned to Mrs. Myse.

She stopped her violent sweeps for one instant with a jerk, then she began again with renewed energy.

"Crying? ah, very like," was all she said; but a pang shot through her and she felt her knees tremble. It was not fancy, then, when she too had thought that 'Scilla had been crying.

Tears? what could tears from 'Scilla's eyes mean? She was not easily moved like other women. No feeling for Andrew's broken leg or Andrew's absence would make her cry. Jael had sometimes thought 'Scilla had no heart at all.

Jael could not work. She felt ill and distracted.

“ I must be goin’, missus,” she said ; “ I must be goin’,—I’ll come agin to-morrow, with your leave.”

She hardly dared to tell herself all she feared ; but a weight lifted itself off her heart for a moment, when she opened the low door to find ‘Scilla safe at home, beside the low fire she had herself lighted.



CHAPTER XI.

ILL NEWS FROM HOME.

JONATHAN'S fortnight passed all too quickly for his mother. At the end of the time she spread out her largest blue-checked cloth upon the table, and folded in it Jonathan's best coat and waistcoat, some limp but spotless shirts, some neatly darned socks and handkerchiefs, doubled the corners over with as much care as if she were sending a casket to the king, and pinned them with a pin held in readiness between her teeth.

She trembled all over as she did these

last offices for her boy ; she was happy and unhappy, elated and miserable, for a fortnight without Jonathan would be to her like one long night, and yet she would not have kept him by her for a kingdom. It did her heart good to see the lightness in his step and the brightness in his eye since Mr. Wanklin had kindled the old flame of ambition in him. It was not to be suffered to burn long, that Jonathan knew well ; the old life was the one for him while his father lived, who sat stolid over the fire and refused to move from Shelbourne. And Mrs. Cleare knew it too, and trembled, poor, frail little woman that she was, trembled thinking—suppose he were to stay away with Mr. Wanklin altogether ! and trembled again, knowing he would give up everything and come back to her.

She grew quieter when he had gone ; when the silence in the house and the lack of the sound of his firm tread seemed to

settle upon her heart, and tell her that now at least it was all a quiet sadness for her, and for him a fortnight's work after his own mind.

Jonathan saw Andrew on his way through Hephreth, where he took the coach to Shibleford, some ten miles on the other side. The doctor's report was good, the leg was going on capitally. The young man had a good constitution, and had not trifled with it. Andrew might hope to be out in a few weeks' time.

"I'm sure to be in again, lad," Jonathan said to him as he left him. "Mr. Wanklin's business is sure enough to bring me to Hephreth, and if it don't, I'll come on a Sunday; only I can't bring you the news from home now." And they both smiled, as Jonathan, hearing the coach horn, ran down the stairs to join it.

So we part at some great crisis, with common-places, and light hearts, to meet

again, if we meet at all, in trouble and despair. And sometimes with dark forebodings, when the parting is a common one, and Providence has willed that we shall meet again a thousand times. Very few souls are prophetic; and it is for the happiness of the race that it is so.

Ten days after, Mr. Wanklin's work, as Jonathan had surmised, made a visit to the market town necessary. And Jonathan volunteered to do the business, thinking of 'Drew in the hospital, to whom the ten days could not have flown as quickly. Perhaps, too, he might meet some of the Shelbourne folk, for it was a market day, and send to and hear of his mother. He had written to her; but he knew she would be pleased and sleep better if Martha Male or some of the neighbours could say that they had seen his face.

He had left the coach, and was walking up the High Street towards his business,

wus than broke his leg—he ought to be wus punished than that, though the Lord He knows best.”

Jonathan was standing aghast before her. There seemed nothing he could say. His heart was full of anger against his friend, and pity for the beautiful girl he had known since she was a little child. The girl that Andrew had seemed to love so well, and protect from every ill that might befall her.

After a moment he said sternly,

“Does 'Drew know of this?”

“That I can't say. I was half a mind to go and tell him myself; but if you'll go and see him it'll be better. He'll have to know sometime or other; and it 'ud be best a friend should tell him, since he's ill.”

Jonathan went to the inn door, and stood without his hat, looking at the dusty pavement. He could not go and face Andrew—he could not speak to his friend

•

without his righteous wrath rising ; and 'Drew was not fit for hard words yet.

But supposing that some other officious village gossip should go ? Supposing some had been already, and that 'Drew was left helpless in the hospital tormented by his own thoughts ?

This decided Jonathan. If all the village folk were against his mate, then he ought less than ever to forsake him.

Perhaps the bitterest cup it is ever man's lot to drink, is that which he tastes when he falls irrevocably in his own esteem. But the next bitterest is when a dear friend falls ; and we have to look on and see that he has fallen. Forgive him, excuse him, love him, we must ; but to put him in the old place, quite in the old place—is it possible ?

As Jonathan walked up the street, a longing came over him to hear Andrew say he was grieved for the terrible wrong he

had done to the girl he loved. He could not understand such love.

“It should be called by a worse name, I reckon,” he said to himself, as he reached the hospital gates.



CHAPTER XII.

SIN AND SORROW.



T was the first time he had ever known the feeling of unease in Andrew's company ; it was the first time he had ever shortened an hour that was to be spent with his mate. Yet how could he be at ease with Andrew now? afraid to excite him or give him pain when he was already ill and suffering, and so afraid to "have it out," as he had had it with Andrew in every trouble they had got into before.

The sickly smell of chloride of lime and

medicine in the clean airy ward seemed sicklier than ever to Jonathan.

At the first sound of his foot on the boards, Andrew's face was turned and looking at him.

"I thought you'd come," he said ; "I'm a deal better. The doctor says I'm gettin' on first rate."

How could he look so placid and cheerful? why did his eyes seem so clear and honest, as if there was no stain upon his conscience, as if he had done no wrong?

Perhaps most of us look ashamed only when others are ashamed for us, not before ; when the veil is torn down, and the real man we have known so long ourselves, has taken the place of the seeming man in the world's eyes. Then we think we are ashamed, but it is of the shame, not of the sin, and how does that stand in God's sight, who loves righteousness?

Jonathan sat down beside the bed, but

he pushed the chair back against the wall, so that he sat beside Andrew, not facing him as he had done before. You would have thought Jonathan was the culprit, to have seen them : he felt like it himself, when he became conscious that he could not bear to meet Andrew's eyes.

They sat thus and talked of little or nothing. Jonathan asked questions about the other patients in the beds on either side. It wearied Andrew very soon. He wanted to hear about home and 'Scilla. He had not forgotten that Jonathan had told him she was sorry for him, and for what had happened. Forgotten it ? how should he ? he had dreamt about it all the night, and thought about it all the day.

"You haven't see'd 'Scilla again ? have you ?" he asked, shyly, after a silence, broken only by Jonathan's playing with the little medicine glass on the small table beside the bed.

"Not again," said Jonathan.

Andrew was silent again for a few moments. Then he said,

"I've a deal o' time to think, I have here. I think a deal about the old place—and her. I'd like to see Master May, I would. I've often been hard when he's spoken kind to me. Now I've thought sometimes maybe my trial had come, and that it 'ud go hard with me. It's a thin' to make a chap remember the wrong things he's done, and the right things he's left without doin'. But I'm feared I thinks most of 'Scilla, she's hardly never out of my mind, day nor night. I suppose she couldn't come to see me, could she? I'd take it so kind if she could. I sometimes keeps on a-thinkin' I'd get round quicker, if so be as I could see her face."

"She's not like to come just at present," said Jonathan.

"She's not ill?" said Andrew, straining

his neck to catch a sight of Jonathan's face. "She's been out o' evenin's, I warrant, and me not there to look ar'ter her, and see her home."

Jonathan made no answer. A fearful dread leapt up in Andrew's heart.

"My God!" he said, and the sweat stood out upon his forehead—"Naught's happened to 'Scilla? my girl's not dead?"

"'Scilla's not dead," said Jonathan, lowering his voice. "She and the child is living."

Jonathan never forget the look upon Andrew's face at that moment. It was a look that haunted him all his life through. Even when happier days had come, and Time, the great healer, had smoothed out later sorrows, this look visited Jonathan in his dreams. Despair and anger, agony and shame—they met there and made havoc of the placid face of the quiet young man with the straight fair hair across his forehead, and

the kind honest eyes, that had lain so patiently till now on his hospital bed.

Before Jonathan could stop him Andrew had raised himself suddenly, throwing the clothes off him violently, as if he were going to get up. The quiet decided nurse was beside him in a moment. She looked angrily at Jonathan, who sat saying nothing.

What had he done? was this the way Andrew would have taken the news he must have been waiting for?

"'Drew, don't hurt yourself now," he said, looking at the pale agitated face beside him. "You can make amends to 'Scilla when the Lord raises you up. You love her, and——"

"*Love her?*" cried Andrew. His voice rose almost to a shriek, and all through the wards they heard him crying again and again—"love her? love her?" with a wild defiance that made Jonathan sick at heart.

Every thin face on every pillow lifted itself up, and asked what it was. The thin faces in the accident ward only, saw Andrew sitting up with wild dilated eyes, and the fierceness of delirium or madness in his face.

Jonathan could do nothing. The nurse could do nothing. But the house surgeon, who had come up, after putting a question or two to Jonathan, said kindly,

“Put the screen round the bed, nurse.” Then to Jonathan, “You stay with him half an hour. Have it out with him quietly, and before you go, speak to me. I don’t want to know any secrets,” he said, laying his hand on Andrew’s trembling shoulder; “but I must know what state you leave his mind in, if we’re to do anything with him.”

They were left alone together. After a little Andrew lay down, too exhausted to sit up. Jonathan held a little sponge

which he dipped in vinegar and water, and pressed on Andrew's burning head. His fingers were large and clumsy for work like this: the little sponge seemed nowhere, as he squeezed it carefully and slowly every time on the edge of the basin, and cautiously moved it, without any drip, over the pillow.

After half an hour he came out from behind the screen, and the nurse called the surgeon.

"It's a bad job, and it's best I should tell you, sir."

"It's better I should know as much as you like to tell," he answered.

Jonathan looked down upon the ground, and his voice shook a little. The surgeon noticed it, and it did not make him like Jonathan the less.

"Tell me what you can," he said again.
"It's quite safe with me."

"There ain't nothing to be ashamed of,

sir," said Jonathan, lifting up his face. "He's got a girl he keeps company with; and she's got in trouble. He's my mate, but I thought he was the cause of it. And I thought by what he said he were expecting it; and I told him as the child was born. And he says, sir, by the God above him, that it isn't his child, and he's never done her no wrong."

The surgeon looked puzzled.

"You think that's the truth then?" he asked, a little doubtfully.

"The truth, sir? He's my mate, sir. He's never told me a lie yet. And if you'll go and see him, you'll believe it's the truth."

They went in together. Andrew was lying quite quiet and worn out, crying silently, like a broken-hearted girl.

"It isn't I as has shamed her," he said suddenly, looking up fixedly into their faces.

"But I'll make her amends?" He stopped crying and dried the tears himself off his face.

"I'm afraid he's wandering a little," said the surgeon. "You had better go."



CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD BIBLE AND WHAT IT SAW.



JOSIAH THORNE had an old Bible, that lay always upstairs in the bed-room, on the top of the rickety chest of drawers.

It had a comprehensive inscription on the first page.

“Josiah Thorne—a present to him, and it’s his Bible.”

It had been Jael’s custom ever since Priscilla had been a little girl, to use this Bible as a magician would his wand.

“Scilla,” she would say, when she was

doubtful as to whether Priscilla were telling her the truth about some childish misde-meanour, "I'm a-goin' to look in here, and that'll tell me true. So now it ain't no use for you to try no deceivin'."

Jael could not read a word of the Bible, no more could Josiah. But that did not make her hesitate in the least about referring to it to "tell her true." And Priscilla had learnt to look at the old brown cover with a childish awe. The terrible book that was never looked at except when something was wrong, and that then would infallibly speak true, and show up the offender—what respect could be great enough for it?

On the sad Saturday night, after poor Priscilla, the sinned against rather than the sinning, had brought an unwelcome little infant into the world, Jael sat stunned and stupefied at the foot of the bed where she lay.

A dim light fell over the poor bare room. The father slept peacefully, and only his heavy breathing disturbed the silence.

Priscilla was awake at first, but Jael did not speak to her. What was there to say? It was all past. words—the sin, and the shame, and the trouble. The old Bible lay there closed upon the drawers; what use to ask it questions?

Jael sat bowed down by the weight of it all. The Lord's judgments were very heavy on her. She had hidden the story of her own fall so long, so watchfully, but her sin had found her out. The girl that did not know her mother had fallen, had fallen too. The Lord's ways were past finding out, said Jael, who felt all the time that she had brought her own griefs upon herself, and that never had she seen the wages of sin dealt out more faithfully.

All the hopes were gone; the comfort, the brightness of later days. Andrew

marry 'Scilla? Fool that she had been to think it! Doubly fool not to have known men better; she who had suffered so from their false promises herself.

She moaned as she thought how she had let him come about the place, how she had felt happy when he brought home 'Scilla, how she had petted the viper that had crept into her nest. And he had never promised even to marry 'Scilla, and yet Jael had trusted him.

Her poor child, her poor witless, innocent child! The tears that had been long time strangers to Jael's eyes, coursed over her weather-beaten face, and fell drop by drop upon the brown hands folded on her knee. How much there is in the folding of the hands! The complacent folding of content was not an attitude for Jael Thorne at her happiest moments; now it was the woofulest despair that looked from the woman's unstrung form, and loosely folded hands.

The silent hours went by, and still the clock ticked solemnly in the little room below. Some rat rushed shrieking through the rafters. All else was silence, only Jael's tears flowed on.

They hardly flowed : their channel was too dry, too long unused, to allow of that healthful stream of weeping that best eases a woman's heart. Jael's tears were wrung from her, slowly and painfully ; and though they fell often, her heart ached on without relief, and a sharp physical pain came into her parched throat.

She was forty years old. She had known suffering, poverty, loneliness before ; she had seen in herself that worst enemy, sin. But now the last and bitterest blow had been dealt. The old enemy had been on her track again, and this time he had laid wait for and ruined, not her—but her child.

Little 'Scilla that God had made so beautiful, only that she might be destroyed.

“The Lord is a hard man !” cried poor Jael !
—“a hard, hard man !” And a few moments after, with a paroxysm of anger and grief that shook her sturdy frame, and convulsed her plain flat features, she threw herself upon her knees beside the bed, and moaned into the faded patchwork counterpane at Scilla’s feet.

“Andrew, false and cruel—to come across my door with your wheedlin’ ways and your comely face, and well-favoured bearin’. It’s comely faces as does all the ill in all the world. *He* came to me with ’s comely face, with ’s promises and his deceivin’—and I were plain, not looked at like other gals about ; I hadn’t never a sweetheart. He took my heart, he winned it away, he did, and then he took my clean name from me. It’s on’y me as is hurt by that, and the Lord he knows I bore wi’ it, and held my peace, and folks was good, and didn’t shame me open. But the child here that the

Lord giv' me as was made so fair—a-purpose for her ruin. Lord forgive me! I forgive thee, as has done this, for I done wrong, I don't deny to thee. But what had I done to Andrew, that he should wrong the child and me? Lord, they say's as thou has pity on the poor—I dun' know thee, it ain't likely as thou 'ud know a deal about me. But I tell thee as Andrew Male of Shelbourne parish has done me a grievous wrong—and her he's ruined—look how she lies there a-sleepin', and the babe upon her arm! My sweetheart as is dead, thou knows I forgave him lon' ago—but don't thee forgive Andrew Male! Thee won't, Lord, if thee knows the rights o' things!"

Priscilla turned in her sleep, and made a crooning sound as she drew her baby nearer to her. Jael lifted up her face an instant, and stayed her torrent of words and moanings.

The candle had burnt down into the

socket, and was throbbing out its life. But the room was light: the pink dawn was stealing in again through the elm tree at the garret window.

Five o'clock boomed out from the steeple at Shelbourne. Jael shivered, and knelt on, crouched up by the poor bed, her grey hair disordered, and her weary eyes fixed on the pinkness of the far-off sky.

Priscilla turned again.

"Do 'e want for anythin'?" said Jael, in a low hoarse voice.

"Give me a drink, mother."

Jael rose from her knees, and found herself stiff from cold and from her unnatural position. She filled a cup with water and put it to Priscilla's lips. She drank, then turned contentedly on her pillow to look at her baby.

Tenderly those untaught hands drew the ragged flannel round the little child, for whom no preparations had been made ;

lovingly the witless girl drew the warm armful to her breast. For her mother she had never shown love, if she felt it: she did not thank her now, or seemed to notice that she was about, and dressed, and waiting on her through the night.

But this child, the fruit of sin, this Priscilla loved. Again she drew it closer to her, and again Jael heard her croon in pleased content. It was such a mockery of Jael's anguish, of the black long night, spent in tears and grief, of the shame and the sin that had come upon her—it went to Jael's heart like a sharp knife. All her self-control left her, and regardless of 'Scilla's state she poured out the burden of her poor heart into the girl's ears.

She fell upon her knees first, and then dragged herself up towards the pillow. 'Scilla, smiling, looked tranquilly at her.

“Well was yer name called Thorne,” said Jael fiercely, clutching at the bed

clothes and looking at the beautiful face that pressed the pillow. "A thorn to me you've been since ever the Lord planted 'e in my side. I've loved 'e, grieved over 'e, toiled for 'e,—and all for this—that 'e should go into the paths of sin and fall—as yer mother did afore 'e. And that babe there," she cried, lifting up her hand—'Scilla drew the baby nearer again and looked frightened—"all the love as ever was in that heart of yourn is gone to that!—to *that*! Andrew Male, may the Lord hear me——"

"Missus," said a voice behind Jael at the head of the stairs. Jael turned round and saw a man's shadow in the doorway.

It was Jonathan.

"Missus," he said, "I've come from Hepreth." He did not tell her that he had been back by coach to Shimbleford, because he could not leave Mr. Wanklin and his work without seeing him again (he knew

the men were at a standstill while he was away) nor that he had walked fifteen miles from Shibleford across the fields that night, to see her and to set Andrew straight with her and all the village folk. Her sad eyes and distracted, disordered look awed him. He knew Jael would grieve; but he had hardly expected grief like this.

She had risen from her cramped knees and stood before him.

"I've grieved for you right sore, Jael," he said. It was a great deal from him.

She only shook her head and went on looking at him, absently, wearily.

"I want to speak with you a minute, if you can give me a hearing," he said.

She followed him slowly down the ladder.

"Have you the rheumatics?" asked Jonathan, seeing how stiffly she moved, and noticing that she held her brown hand upon her heart.

"Rheumatics?" she repeated. And then

she shook her head again, always without speaking.

“ I’ve come to tell you, missus,” he said, “ that you’ve got to make your peace with Andrew.”

Jael’s eyes turned to a fierce brightness.

“ *With Andrew?*” she hissed out.

“ Yes, missus. He loved your girl straightforward and true, and—”

“ Ay, *straightfor’ard*, ay, *very true*—true ’s the devil as follows the innercent soul, and—”

“ Missus! if you don’t believe what I says, nor what Andrew says, come in to Hepreth Hospital, and into Harper’s ward. And on the second bed beyond the first window, you’ll see Andrew lying. I ask you to look at him, and see whether he’s spoken true. If ever man were cut up and broken in pieces like, with bad news, that man’s Andrew. And it’s I that did it all unknowing. And if I’d known how he’d

have taken it, and that he was as clear as day, I'd have cut my hand off to have saved him. We've always been mates, and it's hard that it must be me that was to give him a blow, like what I've given him to-day."

Jael was staring at him now, and silent. "Then he didn't know as she were like to come to this?"

"Know it? no more than I knew it, missus. He swore it before his Maker, lying there upon his bed."

"And who knows then, *who knows?*" moaned the poor woman, rocking herself to-and-fro, and fixing her grief-laden eyes upon Jonathan.

What use was it to answer? Jonathan knew no more than Jael. God's silence was over them.

They sat in His silence, looking at each other; and Jael shivered over the black empty hearth, while the cold grey light of the early morning fell on the dusty, dis-

ordered room, and wrote one word upon everything—desolation.

Suddenly Jael rose, and said, still holding her hand upon her heart,

“ I’ll know yet !—I’ll know ! If he’s far or near I’ll find him, and I’ll shame him !”

And up the ladder she began toiling again, with hurried, uncertain steps.

“ Come up !” she called to Jonathan, who stood below.

He obeyed her, because her ashy colour and trembling gait made him fearful for her and for Priscilla. He would not go quite in, but he would stand in the doorway, to be at hand if he were needed.

Jael went straight to the bed where Priscilla lay. She drew the counterpane down a little, and showed the girl’s fair, fresh, childish face, flushed with sleep, and the rounded arms clasped round the little bundle wrapped in the ragged flannel.

“ ’Scilla !” she said, roughly.

The girl woke with a start, and clasped her baby tighter.

“Don’t kill the babe as you’ve nigh killed me—as you’re a-killin’ me,” said Jael—“no one don’t want it, nor yet the shame it’s brought. I’ve come to ask ’e once more, ’Scilla, and leave ’e I won’t till so be as you’ve spoken out and told me true.”

The girl looked at her wonderingly, but made no answer.

Jael went to the old Bible. Priscilla raised her head a little, and followed her mother with her bright blue eyes.

“See,” said Jael, lifting the book off the chest of drawers, “I’m a-goin’ to look in here. This ’ll tell me true, ’Scilla, and its no good for you to try no deceivin’.”

She lifted it in her hands, and raised it over the bed where ’Scilla lay; the short broad figure threw its shadow over the girl, and she trembled and hid her face. But there was no answer.

"Missus!" said Jonathan, taking a step forward. He thought Jael would be the death of 'Scilla.

But she would brook no interference. Angrily she waved Jonathan back, and stood a moment thinking.

At last a sudden inspiration seized her, as she watched her girl beginning to fondle the baby again, crooning over it softly, lovingly.

"'Scilla!" Jael threw the Bible on to the pillow. Then she fell upon her knees, and looking into the girl's face with an expression of mingled love and passion, she said, fiercely,— "'Scilla, if 'e don't tell me who it is as has deceived and wronged thee, I'll take the child from 'e!"

It was then that Jonathan, in the doorway, heard distinctly through the twilight a whispered name.

It was a name so respected, a name that stood so high with Jonathan himself, with

Mr. May, with all the Shelbourne people, he grew dizzy wondering whether he had heard aright.

He went down the ladder slowly, without speaking to Jael again. There was silence with her too ; she too was stunned by the unexpected blow.

It seemed to Jonathan that heaven and earth had been turned upside down ; that right and wrong had run together in some great catastrophe, and were no longer to be distinguished.

He had to breathe the fresh air, and to think of Mr. May and of his mother, before his mind regained its balance.

They still would be true and pure, though all the world made shipwreck.



CHAPTER XIV.

AARON FALK'S SUNDAY.

“**R**ING-a-ding, ding!” went the merry bells of Shelbourne Church that Sunday morning, just as they had done on other Sunday mornings. Out came the sun in his glory, and out came all happy Shelbourne in its Sunday best.

Pedley, the clerk, in his black swallow-tailed coat and white cravat; Hare, the baker, in his pea-coat, with the velvet collar; Peel, the butcher, with his blooming fat cheeks; Horne, the postman, with his

tramp, tramp, up the aisle, and his business-like way of opening his pew-door as if he had letters to deliver there, and letters of importance; Mr. May, in his neatly-darned surplice and smoothly brushed hair; Mrs. Myse, in her best pelisse and bonnet; all the school-children helter-skelter, push and jostle, tumbling over each other into their places. Behind them, coughing, wheezing, and dyspeptic, something long and straight like a bottle, robed in great-coats and corked with a comforter. It was Mr. Byles.

Pedley was breathing about the church heavily: he always breathed heavily when he was busy, and happy, and important. And what busier, happier, more important day could be for Zimri Pedley, parish clerk, than Sunday?

The harmonium had begun to play, the basses were scraping their throats, and the trebles were touching bonnets and whisper-

ing. However many practices there might be during the week, there was always something to whisper about on Sunday.

Martha Male, in black cotton gloves and with folded hands, was seated complacently in her place. It was not the custom for the women to come to church in the mornings ; but to-day Martha Male felt constrained to make an appearance in public. She had worked well that morning in Andrew's cause ; now, for the credit of the family, she would come and show her happy full face, framed in its neat bonnet, to the Shelbourne world. Not only her face told her story ; the crown of her bonnet, and the grey ribbon in it, stood out stiffly with respectability. Every bow was a banner of motherly peace and pride.

But one pew was empty—the great square pew, red cushioned and comfortable, that belonged to Mr. Falk.

He stood in his back-yard and heard

the bells ring that Sunday morning ; he went in-doors, and stood in the parlour, with the Hepreth paper in his hand. The bells followed him there, till they had beat out a long half-hour, and then they ceased. Aaron Falk put down the paper, and stood irresolute. Should he go to church ? Had people heard ? Had the girl perhaps told the truth ? Was it being passed from mouth to mouth now amongst the women that stayed at home to cook the dinners, and would the men whisper it while they waited for the harmonium to strike up ?

The harmonium struck up even then. Still Aaron Falk stood hesitating, with his face towards the door. It was cowardly not to go ; it would stamp him, perhaps, as the guilty man. If he went, it would be braving the scandal, showing he cared nothing—that the tale was false.

What tale ? Aaron Falk had heard no tale but that of Andrew Male's miscon-

duct. He had not heard that Andrew had denied it the night before from his bed, in Hepreth Hospital. For all he knew, the people still thought Andrew to blame. For, said Aaron to himself—and as he said it the harmonium pealed out with all its little strength, as if to drown his thought—if Andrew *did* deny it, who would believe him? He had kept company with the girl so long. With *him* the blame must rest—*must* rest, said Aaron Falk, with irresolute resolution.

Yet suppose *another* tale *were* abroad? Suppose Aaron Falk's good name were gone? Suppose the well-to-do, respected brewer—whose fathers for generations back had been the great men of Shelbourne, to whom all the people had looked for help—suppose he had fallen in the esteem of these poor labourers and their wives, and fallen all the lower because he had stood so high before?

The harmonium ceased ; the service had begun. It was too late to go to church now. Aaron Falk sank into his arm-chair and stared restlessly at the empty grate.

The thought of how he might now stand in the sight of all the people, in the sight of Mr. Byles—above all, in the sight of Mr. May—this unnerved him quite. The colour had gone from his straight, regular features ; they had taken a pinched, worn look. To lose his name, to lose the goodwill of his neighbours and his dependents, it was a terribly hard thing for Aaron Falk. Fool that he had been ! If he could but undo the past, and be sure he held the place he had held a year ago ! A month ago, said he, remembering that a month ago everyone had smiled on him—that even yesterday no one knew !

Later, but not yet, the better man in him carried the wish to the year ago, and left it mostly there. Later he knew repentance,

and was so far a nobler man. Now his suffering was too great for anything but a keen and hard remorse. That it should be known, —there was the sting.

He sprang up suddenly. Perhaps it was not known! Fool that he had been again, to loiter here, when something might be done to avert the evil thing he dreaded. But yesterday they thought it was Andrew; to-day, all Shelbourne might be thinking the same. The girl might not have betrayed him; she might have been *afraid* to tell.

He seized his hat and went out again by the back-yard. He saw a man in a field a little way off, and hesitated. If people saw him going to Josiah Thorne's cottage he was undone. Should he wait till night? And his thoughts turned to a large dark comforter that hung in the lobby, and that would be suitable and useful for that evening walk. But no—Sunday was an idle

day. Before nightfall half Shelbourne might have been at Jael's house, perhaps at Priscilla's bed-side. It was now only ten o'clock ; the chances of his being the first visitor to that out-of-the-way place were good and many.

Some people say a Sunday morning in the open air is as good and as inspiring as any service between four walls. It may be so to some. It was not so to Aaron Falk, on whose eyes the familiar landscape ached, this Sunday morning. He went by round-about paths, it is true : he was ready at any moment to strike off in an opposite direction from the Thornes' house. But he knew every field and lane ; it seemed to him they knew him also.

The air was sunny and light with the lightness of early autumn, and the sky a very tender delicate blue. The thistles had gone to seed, and the linnets stirred them and sent them flying. The crows cawed

lazily, knowing no one would molest them now. The very stubble looked golden in the sunlight. God's finger was on everything, and it was all fair.

Perhaps there was too much of God for Aaron Falk's peace, as he walked on hurriedly through it all.

That mysterious un-ease that falls upon the transgressors of His laws had fallen upon the soul of this man, though as he quickened his pace the hope came more and more strongly to him that Shelbourne did not know—that Shelbourne never *need* know after all.



CHAPTER XV.

JAEI'S SECOND VISITOR.

UT of breath, and with some colour once more in his face, Mr. Falk reached the little gate, still swinging out crazily upon its broken hinge.

On the orchard trees were still the un-gathered apples ; a few clothes dried to boards stood out stiff upon the privet hedge. The grass was rank and long, and Jael's black cat crept stealthily about in it. It was a weird place always, looking neglected and uncared for, and never more so than to-day, when the old man had been a month

in his bed, and Jael's thoughts and time were given to other things than the clothes or the orchard.

Aaron Falk buttoned his Sunday coat at the waist, and eased his collar, as he approached the house.

He tapped. A chicken rushed between his feet through an opening in the old weather-beaten door. It startled him. But not more than the face which looked out at him when the door had been pushed open with a harsh sound as if stones were under it, and Jael Thorne's short, stout figure filled the foreground.

They stood looking at each other, the well-dressed, well-to-do brewer, and the dirty, middle-aged, poor woman, and neither spoke. It was Mr. Falk who hesitatingly broke the silence.

"I have come to speak to you," he began, his colour changing a little under her steady gaze.

"And speak you may," she answered, sternly, "though it's little good as ever came o' words when deeds is done and over. And speak outside you shall, if you please, for come across this door you shan't, so long as *I've* breath in this here body."

Mr. Falk considered a moment which line he had better take. He thought the safest would be to try and appease Jael's anger. *She* knew then: did any one else know? The haunting fear made him hesitate no longer.

"I hear your girl has come to trouble, Jael," he began again.

"*Trouble?* you *hear*, do you? It's been a long time reaching *your* ears. It's a wonder you didn't come by the knowledge wi'out *hearin'!*" She raised her clenched hand, and said, fiercely, "You've ruined my girl, Aaron Falk, and for all I've been a bad un before her, and for all you're a

brewer and a landowner, and she a poor half-witted thing as has got no friends—for all that, I'll have my revenge on ye, and I'll see her righted, so far's one can be righted as a man's wronged as *you've* wronged her."

"Jael," said Aaron, changing colour very unmistakably now, "I've come to have a word with you. Perhaps it will be better for you, as well as me, if you'll listen."

He had keen eyes, and now that he was on his mettle and master of himself again, he fixed them with a determined look on Jael. Her glance had conquered him for a moment; he would master her now. Under the keenness of his look there was an under current of fear—an almost craven fear, but it was hid away from the blunt, honest woman, and might have been hidden to wiser eyes than hers.

Jael involuntarily drew back into the house, and suffered Mr. Falk to follow her.

He lifted the latch, and shut the door carefully. Then putting his stick on the table, he said, with affected *hauteur*—

“Priscilla has told you, I suppose, what is not true. I guess so by your behaviour to me.”

“*Told me!*” cried Jael, too excited to speak without repeating his words continually; and her tone struck terror to Aaron’s heart. “*Told me!*” Did it mean *every one* knew? Was all chance over?

He was still knocked down by this fear, when Jael called out suddenly, “What has brought *you* here, Aaron Falk, if it’s a false tale?”

He could only look at her, with a startled and ashamed look.

“*Hear the tale* you’ve not,” said Jael, standing away from him, as if she would not defile herself by contact with him, “and if it’s not a guilty heart as has kerried you here this mornin’, it’s a wondrous strange

thing, it is. Make a clean breast of it, and humble yourself, Aaron Falk, for to try on deceivin' with me, it ain't no manner of use nor profit."

A sudden hope had filled his mind while she spoke. "*Hear* the tale you've not," she said. Then it was not abroad yet!

"Jael," he said—almost trembling with the sense of sudden relief, and forgetting in the sweetness of it the denial of his guilt—"Jael, you've not spread the tale abroad, I see: you would not do me such an unkindness, I know. I am so willing to try and make amends to you—to—to"—he began feeling in his pocket for his purse—"Anything you would consider a compensation,—anything in reason, you know, Jael," he said, opening the purse, and looking at her at the same moment, furtively.

The room shook under the thundering blow that Jael's fist came down with on the table. She hissed out her words at

him, while the veins swelled in her brown neck and face stretched towards him.

“*Compense* me? *Compense me* for my gal’s good name? Out with your money, you, Aaron Falk, and begone from my doors! You think to tie our tongues, do you, with your gold and your silver? They can do a deal, they can, making a villain look like a gen’leman, and whited outside like the ‘pulchres as the blessed Lord talked about, as was full of rubbish and muck within. My tongue’s free, and so’s my gal’s; and if others is blamed as is innocent like the lamb unborn, and t’other is the bad un as has done the wrong, I’m not one to let the mud stick to the one, and let t’other go clean and dry, with a stiff neck and a foul heart. I’ll say my say, and all the *parish* shall know the truth, Aaron Falk, before ever another night’s over.”

And she beckoned him haughtily to the door.

The colour had come back now to Aaron's face. He stood quite quiet till Jael had exhausted herself, his lips compressed in silent determination.

"Jael," said he waving his hand over the floor of the room, paved rudely with broken bricks and stones, "you know on whose ground this house stands?"

She did not answer, and he went on—

"You also know to whom the orchard belongs? Who gives you the house rent-free? Who allowed your father to squat here? Who allows him to remain here when he is useless as a labourer, and worse than useless as a tenant?"

He saw with secret satisfaction that his words were taking effect, and he continued—

"You know your father's age, and that *you* are not as young or as strong as you have been. You know that Priscilla is unable to support herself or you. I shall

be sorry, of course, to deprive you of the cottage, and to turn your father out; I know it would be the death of him. He has been here since he was a lad, and he has often told me he loves every brick and stone."

Jael's head had bowed a little upon her breast.

"It rests with you, mind, Jael. You will have to decide now. If your father is taken from his bed, and dies in the workhouse or on the high road, his death will lie at your door."

Her head bowed further still.

"You are a proud woman, and I know that you've been wronged. But the wrong is done, and your telling the tale in the parish won't mend matters now. It will only ruin me and *you*, Jael—you, and your *father*, and *Priscilla*, more than me, perhaps."

The short, stout figure was leaning upon the table now. The brown withered face

was buried in the hard brown hands. Great sobs shook the broad shoulders, that the threadbare gown covered so scantily.

A tremulous sound came down from the little garret above.

Jael raised her head instantly.

"Yes, fa'der! I'm a-comin'!"

She went slowly and heavily up the ladder, holding her hand upon her heart.

"What is't, fa'der dear?"

"'Scilla says as some un's a-sayin' we must go out and leave 'e old place. It's not right, is it, lass? It's not right as 'at nobody's a-sayin' that?"

Jael did not answer. She held her hand over her eyes.

"Lass, if they be a-sayin' that, ast 'em just to come and take the life o' me. It 'ud be bad for you and 'Scilla if I died a-goin' down the ladder, and I couldn't go not no further. My heart he'd 'ave broke by the second rung."

The sweet old face puckered up feebly, like the face of a little child ; and, like a little child, the old man wept.

“ No, no, fa'der, we ain't a-goin' out. No un shan't a-turn us out. Don't 'e be fret-tin', fa'der !”

And slowly and heavily again down the ladder went Jael Thorne.

“ He's mine,” she said, solemnly, “ he's mine ; and his time 's a-drawin' nigh. I can't go for to break his heart, as mine's been broke. So if silence 'll leave him in his bed, Master Falk——”

“ Thank you, Jael !” he answered, eagerly seizing her hand ; “ I knew you would come to think as I do.”

“ No, no—not that, sir !” said Jael, drawing back, and covering her hands with her apron. “ Neither hand nor money for me. It's enough to have bought my tongue, or taken it force-ways, like as you've done already. I've promised, and that's enough.”

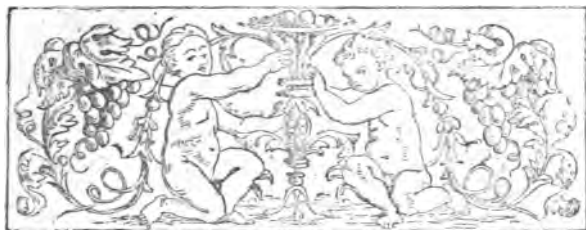
“I know it’s enough.” He began to turn to go. “And no one else knows—has heard the tale?” he asked, hesitating.

“Jonathan Cleare knows,” said Jael.

Aaron’s heart sank.

“He were here when she spoke out,” said Jael. “But ’e needn’t to fear him. He’ll tell no man. It’s Jael Thorne as ye had to fear; and now,—you’ve got your way with her.”

Her head sank again upon the table; and as Aaron Falk went out, it was the wailing sound of her voice, and not the bells of Shelbourne, that haunted his way home.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE ONE MAN WHO KNEW.



HERE was one man, then, who knew in Shelbourne. It was a strange fate that brought Aaron Falk face to face with that one man as he went home.

He did not know whether to be glad or sorry when he saw Jonathan coming straight towards him in the field beyond Josiah Thorne's lane.

Men of Jonathan's type do not lose themselves for long in fits of abstraction, as better educated and less physically power-

ful men do. If he could have been in a reverie, he was in one now. But he only showed it by kicking up a stone meaninglessly here and there in the stubble, and walking for a yard or two with his head down. But he was quite conscious of where he was, of the smoke rising over the orchard from the Thornes' cottage, and of his own unwonted absence from church. Why he had not gone he could hardly have told. He only knew he felt restless and disquieted. Andrew was clear. But who was this that had taken the cloak of blame and shame instead? Mr. Falk, Jonathan's best friend—barring Andrew—and the friend of all the Shelbourne folk; who would fall next, and, from being a pattern of respectability, become capable of any low or cowardly deed? Jonathan's faith in men was sorely shaken. He felt he could not go to church and listen to Mr. May's counsels, to turn to him that had

smitten one cheek the other also. For it was not his own cheek that had been smitten now. But he had been injured deeply through his friend, his David, who lay helpless in the Harper ward. That Andrew should have ruined Priscilla had seemed bad enough to him ; but that Andrew's love should be ruined by another man — and that man Mr. Falk, who might have known better—this Jonathan felt it hard to forgive.

He had as great a shrinking from seeing Aaron Falk as the culprit himself could have had from meeting Jonathan. He had an almost childish dislike to giving pain, and to see Aaron and not speak out his mind he knew was impossible. And then, with him as with Jael, indeed as with half the people in the place, there was the weight of many obligations to lay a ban upon his speech. Many a time had Mr. Falk's gig taken Mrs. Cleare to Hepreth,

in the days when there was still a chance of her hearing being restored by attendance at the hospital. Many a bottle of medicine and bowl of broth had found its way to the elder Jonathan, when his son was away, and the sickness of the husband drained the poor wife's resources. Of late such favours had not been needed. Jonathan earned good wages, and his parents needed for nothing. But between the young blacksmith and the prosperous brewer a relationship of mutual courtesies and goodwill had sprung up; and on a footing more palatable by far to Jonathan than that of benefactor and recipient.

But once full in Mr. Falk's way, Jonathan was not likely to avoid him, however much he might wish it. He saw the craven cowed look that lurked under a seeming indifference of manner.

"Good-morning, Jonathan," jauntily.

"Good-morning, sir," curtly.

Jonathan was not going to help him out of his difficulty, that was clear.

“I understand you’ve been at Thornes’,” said Mr. Falk; “it’s a bad business this about—the girl—I understand you’ve been there—you heard her accuse me, eh? I don’t understand it. I—”

“I didn’t understand it either, sir, before this. But I think I see my way through it now. At least I see this, that you’ve been at Josiah’s cottage. I expect, if you’ve business there, sir, that what Scilla said’s true. An honest man that heard a scandal wouldn’t go sneaking to the place where it lies, I take it—let alone the man that *can’t* have heard the scandal, by reason that it isn’t put abroad yet.”

“Jonathan,” said Mr. Falk, boring a hole in the ground with his stick, and speaking rapidly and with agitation, “if it’s quite true that no one knows yet, except you, then I feel I can depend on your honour. Jael has given me her word; so it rests with you whether you’ll injure an

old friend by spreading a slander that'll do only harm and no good."

"Ay, harm it *will* do," said Jonathan. "But as to holding my tongue about it, Mr. Falk, sir, that's another matter."

Aaron looked anxious again. The pinched look came back to his features as he stood looking at the green wood, and the far blue hills, and Hepreth lying under its blue veil of smoke in the valley. Jonathan's tone was too resolute and defiant for his peace. He must knock under with this man if he were to make any way with him.

"We are all apt to make mistakes—to—" he began, deprecatingly.

"Yes," Jonathan interrupted him, "we are all apt to do wrong, and to do foul deeds, some of us. But when it's done, I think the English of it's the best—and I don't know the tongue as calls ruining another man's sweetheart, and she not all there—a *mistake*. Mistakes can mostly be

undone, sir. But these mistakes, as you call them—they need a piece of stuff as God Almighty's not wove yet, to mend them."

Aaron Falk went on boring the hole in the ground without answer. After a time, he said, when Jonathan moved as if he were going—

"I believe I can depend on you to keep silence—not to spread the slander. What good it will do you, or Hephreth folk, to have it blazed abroad, I don't see; and it would ruin a respectable man's character."

Jonathan, in spite of himself, gave a low laugh of contempt.

"*Respectable!*" he said, between his teeth, turning again to go.

"Jonathan," said Mr. Falk, "I've done you many good turns. I ask you this one favour—to keep this secret. I don't deny it—I believe it's true. I wish to God it weren't. But as it is, the harm is done. I throw myself on your goodness, Jonathan."

Insensibly he fumbled with his purse, but he knew too well the man he was dealing with to dare to bring it out. If Jael had spurned money, what would not Jonathan do at the bare suggestion ?

“How did you buy over Jael’s tongue ?” asked Jonathan, bluntly. “*That* would not do much with her,” he said, pointing to the trouser pocket in which Aaron kept his hand, and from which a jingle had once or twice been heard to come.

Like a chidden child, Aaron removed his hand.

“I only appeal to your good heart,” said he, and his voice was low and trembling.

The tone touched Jonathan—so did the words of the appeal, in which no word was said of past favours.

“Look here, sir, I don’t want to harm you. I believe, to have done as you’ve done’s as heavy a load as ever a man can

carry. I don't want to pull you down in other folks' eyes—I don't. But look here, sir"—he lifted his arm and pointed to Hephreth in the valley—"the man as you've wronged 's lying there, sir, and he's my mate. We've been mates since ever we wore pinafores, and went to get our schooling together. And it's the thought of him as made me say I couldn't abear to hold my tongue. What am I to say, sir, when he asks me, in the name o' God, who it is that's ruined 'Scilla?"

There was no answer. Jonathan went on—"I tell you what it is, sir, so long as I can keep it from Andrew I'll keep it: it'll be a deal the best for him as well as you. But if the time should come as I *must* speak out for the sake of Andrew—that day I'll speak. But," he added, watching the pallor that had spread again over Mr. Falk's straight, fine features—"that day I'll come and tell *you* first, sir, and there's my word."

And Jonathan strode away, leaving Aaron Falk still standing, bewildered, by the hole in the stubble.

He quickly came to himself, and overtook Jonathan.


"If ever," he said, "I can do anything for you in any way, you'll let me know, Jonathan. I'll do it, whatever it is—and there's my hand upon it."

"Well, it's not for me to forgive, or not to forgive," said Jonathan, holding out his hand—and so they parted.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE FALLING OF THE LEAF.

 O the sweetness of autumn went by, and Shelbourne clothed herself in russet, and then sadly began to disrobe for the coming winter; and the ground lay thickly carpeted with yellow elm leaves, and brown beech leaves; and the limes on either side the Red Inn shed theirs in beautiful bright patches of gold and green, with dark spots here and there, harlequin fashion, half the leaf-gold, half green, only that the gold melted into the green as no loom ever yet wove it. Perhaps the mediæval monks came nearer

to it than any craftsmen, in their wondrous blendings of colour and form on the pages of the old missal. And they had learnt it straight from God and nature.

And Aaron Falk's secret was still kept.

But to him, and to some of the simple souls of Shelbourne, the sweet rhythm of the season was jarred and out of tune. The stillness that seemed at the falling of other years to speak to them of peace, spoke now of sadness and trouble, and the inscrutable ways of God.

They could not have told you this, perhaps, but they felt it. Jael, Jonathan, Aaron Falk, Andrew, Priscilla—one man had sinned, and all these must suffer with him. Jonathan, who thought as well as suffered, felt it was easier now to believe that hard saying in the Book—"By *one* man came sin."

But the trouble and the struggle was fought out in secret, in the inner life.

Jonathan stood at his anvil all the day ; Andrew lay upon his back in Hepreth hospital, and was silent ; Jael gathered the forgotten apples, and sold them as she had done every year—and sorely now she wanted the little money they brought her ; and Aaron Falk, to all appearance the most unmoved of all, went about the brewery, and the yard, and to the big square pew in church—to Mr. May's house sometimes, not often—everywhere except to Jonathan's forge : and before all the world he could hold up his head, except before these two men. With Mr. May he still tried to do so ; with Jonathan, if he ever came across him, which was seldom now, he did not even try.

It was a very strange feeling to him, this new awe of Mr. May. Hitherto he had felt so superior, as a man, to the curate, with his hundred pounds a year, his threadbare alpaca coat, his empty, unfurnished

house, and his gentle, almost feeble manner, and narrow chest. And Mr. May was under such obligations to him. He could hardly have lived through some winters without the brewer's timely gifts of port wine and stout. And the curate invariably treated him with such deference. How could it be that Aaron Falk should ever fear him?

Ah, Aaron Falk! you will understand by-and-by, if you have not thought it out already, that the manly man, and the man of the broad chest, the man of the fat purse and the respected name—all these must bow down at last before the true man, who has the fear of God before his eyes, and has kept His paths straight. Before the richer or the poorer man, the stronger or the weaker, no man who has a right to the name will feel afraid. But before the better and nobler man, that is a different thing altogether.

One day, just when November had set in, and the days were getting short, and the air damp and chilly, Jonathan was standing in the workshop, with one foot upon the slake-tub, manipulating a shapeless piece of iron with pincers. The forge fire had got low, as the day's work was nearly over; and when a voice called at the door "Good-evenin' to you, Jonathan," he could not see who it was that spoke, but the voice startled him. Could it be Andrew come home?

It was not Andrew, but it was Andrew's mother. Martha Male, in her Sunday best, was standing, plump and comely, in the doorway.

"Have you been at Hepreth?" asked Jonathan, taking his foot off the tub, and passing his fingers through his thick brown hair, which was a way he had when he asked a question, and felt a little shy about the answer. He knew Andrew would

reproach him for not having been to see him for so long.

"Yes, I've been. And Andrew, he's a-comin' out Saturday. He's a-gettin' on wonderful, he is."

"I'm right glad to think he's getting well, missus," said Jonathan.

"And him suffered so. Wonderful he suffered, I suppose, when the bones was a-gingerin' together. And he's proper sadly. He don't seem to have no 'dacity in him. I'd take it kind if you'd come in and spend th' evenin' Saturday, jest to keep his spirits up a bit."

"I'll come in, missus," said Jonathan, relieved that the proposal was not that he should have a *tête-à-tête* with his mate, who would be sure to question him about Priscilla. For the first time in his life, he feared being alone with Andrew. Saturday after Saturday had passed, and he could not go to Hepreth. To sit there by

Andrew's bed, and be questioned and cross-questioned, as he had been the one time he took courage and went, about a fortnight after he had heard the truth, was more than he could face. He knew that he could not break his promise to Mr. Falk ; he knew that if he could, it would be the worst thing possible for Andrew. He knew what Andrew was when his blood was up. Mr. Falk and Andrew could not live in the same place, if once the truth came to Andrew's knowledge. So Jonathan had evaded his eager questionings as best he might, and had kept away from Hepreth.

"I'm glad the gal's agoin' to be put away before he comes home agin, I am," said Mrs. Male, setting her ample person on one of Jonathan's narrow benches. "It'll be a deal better for him, it will. He were al'ays wonderful foolish after her, and his father nor me never liked it."

“Put away?” repeated Jonathan, in astonishment.

“She ain’t a-goin’ to be kep’ at home, not likely. Didn’t you hear as the old gen’leman’s a-taken worse, and Jael, poor gal, she can’t leave him, not to ’arn a shil-lin’? And how’s she to keep ’Scilla, and feed and clothe ’em all? It’s a bad job, it is, as that there man as has behaved so shameful can’t be found out. If it were my gal, I’d walk the country but I’d find him out. If he were breathing the Lord’s air anywheres, I’d lay hands on him.”

“But what is to become of her?” asked Jonathan, as much to turn the conversation as in his real anxiety for ’Scilla’s fate.

“What’s to come on her? Why, I suppose what comes to all gals as goes the way she’s gone. The Work’us to be sure.”

And Mrs. Male bundled up her skirt, and showed her neatly-laced thick boots, and clean petticoats, as she stepped out of

the shed, wishing Jonathan "Good-evening."

The soft-hearted woman had something of that hard side to her character that unerring respectability is apt to wear.



CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW WOULD ANDREW TAKE IT ?



So he was coming home on Saturday, was Andrew ; and little 'Scilla was going to the workhouse.

There was some need for Jonathan to ask how Andrew would take the news. The very name of workhouse had an ill-odour for such respectable folks as Andrew came of. Would he resent the indignity for 'Scilla, and try to help her from it ? Or would he feel it was best that she should be "put away," lost as she now must be to him ?

Even Jonathan did not know his mate well enough to answer. He had never been in love, though he had a great respect for women. How he should decide, if he were divided between his love and his honour as Andrew was, he could not tell. On the whole, he thought he should persuade Andrew to let 'Scilla go to Hepreth. It would be best on all accounts. Jonathan had enough selfishness to be aware it would be best for him. The scandal would soon die out when the poor girl was out of sight; and the subject, little by little, would be dropped, even between himself and Andrew. Jonathan could not get over the feeling of uneasiness that laid hold of him when he knew that Andrew's secret was in his keeping, and that to Andrew he could not tell it. He always fell back upon the old argument—it would be the worst thing possible for Andrew to know. The wrong was over and done: and if Aaron Falk were killed

for his sin, it would not give back 'Scilla to her lover. And yet Jonathan could not convince himself. He felt somehow as if, against his will, he had become a traitor to his mate.

Then his thoughts turned to poor Jael ; and as he raked out the forge fire and drew on his coat, he made up his mind to go and see her and 'Scilla. Andrew would take it unkindly if he could tell him nothing of them when he came home. And Jonathan had never been to the Thornes' cottage since that early morning, six weeks before, when he had stood on the landing, and heard the sad whisper that came so audibly through the twilight and the stillness.

Instead of having any feeling of affinity with Jael, because of this secret that he shared with her, he had rather disliked the idea of seeing her. She had promised, and he had promised ; and nothing had hap-

pened to alter the condition of that promise. Very nearly all, if not all, Shelbourne had accepted Andrew's denial, when they heard how he had suffered when the news of the birth of 'Scilla's child reached him. The sin of leading 'Scilla astray they thought him quite capable of. The sin of hypocrisy, of feigning a grief he could not feel if the child were his,—this they acquitted him of. They were not a cringing, hypocritical race. Whatever their faults were, they were straightforward, and on the surface. It did them credit that almost with one consent they exonerated Andrew.

And then to encourage them all in this view, there was the constant asseveration of Jael that Andrew was innocent. If she had not good reason for saying so, why should *she* protect him?

But resolutely Jael stuck to it, that An-

drew *was* innocent. And, though it was the hardest pang she could now be open to, she had made up her mind to "put away" 'Scilla.

Jonathan, knocking at the door, and going in, found the girl on a low stool by the fire, with her baby on her knees. She was smiling over it, singing snatches of old cradle-songs, swaying herself to and fro, while she rocked it to sleep.

Jonathan stood looking at her. She looked up, too, and smiled radiantly at him.

"Well, 'Scilla," he said, not knowing what else to say. It was the first time he had spoken to her since things had been so sadly changed.

"Well, Jonathan," she said, still smiling.

"Is your mother in?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so," said 'Scilla, dreamily, lost again in admiration of the flannel bundle she was holding.

Jael's heavy foot moved across the garret above, and began to come down the ladder.

"Be that you, Jonathan? The sight o' you makes me of a tremble, though I dun' know as why it should. But I haven't set eyes on you since that day as—well, well, it's no use for to go back to th' old troubles. There's plenty o' new uns al'ays to hand."

She brushed the back of her hand across her eyes; and, though she began rubbing the table briskly with a cloth, Jonathan could see the broad shoulders did tremble.

"Sit down, missus, won't you?" he asked.

She leant against the table, and folded her arms, from which the worn sleeves had been turned up. The brown, deeply-lined face had taken many fresh pencillings in these past weeks. There was an unutterably sad, hopeless expression now, that had

taken the place of that keen, hawk-like look of other days.

“The old gentleman’s sadly, I hear,” said Jonathan.

“Sadly? yes, proper sadly. The damp and the cold’s ta’en him wonderful.”

“How long has he been ill?”

“Ill he’s been this many a year. But I never see’d him not like this afore. He’s drucken’d ever sin’ that there”—pointing to ‘Scilla’s baby—“come in the world.”

“Did he take it much to heart, missus?” asked Jonathan, seeing the girl was still wholly engrossed in the baby.

“Not so much that, I don’t think. On’y Martha Male she tells me as a new life a-comin’ in a house mostly saps the old life as is nigh a-goin’ out. I makes no account o’ what she says, I don’t; but she’s right sometimes, is Martha Male.”

“Perhaps it’ll be best, then, missus,” said Jonathan, cautiously—for he did not know

how Jael would take it—"that 'Scilla and the little one should be out of the way for a while, so long as the old gen'leman's so poorly."

Jael stood with her arms folded, her small brown hands pushed up under each turned-up sleeve of the opposite arm. She made no answer; but her stern mouth closed a little more firmly.

"Missus," said Jonathan, beckoning her to the door; and they went out, and stood in the narrow, disorderly garden-path, where the brambles laid themselves over Jael's skirts, and tugged at them when she moved. "Missus, you know there be many of us that would be glad to help you so far as we could. Mother 'ud rather take poor 'Scilla any day—to pay her a visit, you see—rather than that she should go to the 'house.' But you know how thick we live—only the bedroom for father and mother, and a make-shift bed in the other room

for me. But if there's anything I could do to help you, missus, and if you'd take it kind from an old friend, and not think offence, it would do me good to help you. It couldn't be much, because father's past work now, with his illness, and I've to keep them both and myself. But a little's better than nothing. I think I could promise you something regular every week, if it was ever so little—just to keep you from putting away 'Scilla."

Jonathan had forgotten all his prudence for himself, the dilemma that the girl's removal would help so to free him from, he had even for a time forgotten Andrew, and how hard it would be for him, poor fellow, to be always seeing 'Scilla. The sight of Jael's stern face, that spoke of a greater anguish than showers of tears from other women would have done—this had made him forget for a time everything except his wish to save 'Scilla to her.

But as he came back to himself, and to some of his old prudence, Jael said—

“Jonathan, ’e be as good a friend as ever woman had. My heart’s hard, but it ’ud need to be harder not to feel the sharp edge of kind words like yourn. But beholden to no man I can’t be, Jonathan: it goes agin me. If there’s one as should pay, it’s him as wronged my gal. But I won’t touch his money, and I can’t touch yourn. Work I can’t, not to earn a fardin’. Leave fa’ders I can’t—he’s as helpless as any babby, he is; and ’Scilla, she ain’t got eyes for no one but the child. And though I tells on’y you, Jonathan—and you needn’t tell it again—I’m not the woman I used to be; I can’t do not as I used to could. I’m taken wonderful sharp with the pain here”—and she held her hand upon her heart—“and it’s like to take my life from me when it comes like that.”

“So you think it’s best for ’Scilla to go, missus?” said Jonathan.

“Best?” she answered. “I don’t know as there’s any best for the like o’ me. It’s all worse and worse, I take it. But it ain’t no use to go agin the Lord ; and starve at home we can’t, Jonathan.”

“It’s a bad place for young girls,” said Jonathan, more to himself than to her. “I suppose the old gen’leman wouldn’t like to go himself—”

Jael broke in furiously—

“*Fa’der* a go in the ‘house?’ *Me* put away *fa’der* in that place? It breaks my heart to put ’Scilla there—she as is happy anywheres, so long as she has the babby. But me to put *fa’der* there—as if it warn’t me as has brought him to shame first—and my gal arter me. No, no, the Lord guv’ me my *fa’der*, but I take it the devil guv’ me ’Scilla. And now,” she went on—her voice falling to that low wailing tone so unusual

with her, seldom, if ever, heard by any one but Jonathan—"now it's no good for me to fight against the Lord no more. One on 'em I must put away, and who'll it be but 'Scilla?"

The tears came into her dry eyes at last.

"I don't think she'll fret, missus," said Jonathan.

He was watching Priscilla, through the window, tossing her baby gently up and down in a rapture of delight before the fire.

"Fret? Not she. That comforts me. She don't fret for nothin', so long as she's the babby."

"And when will you send her?" he asked presently, growing more courageous.

"I dun' know. It 'ud best be soon."

"Missus, 'Drew's coming home Saturday. It 'ud be best for him not to happen on 'Scilla."


“That’s right, Jonathan, that’s right,” she answered. “My gal shan’t put another thorn in his pillow, if I can help it. I’ll get the order, and she can go Friday.”

But the order did not come in time.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE JOURNEY HOME.

“ THOUGHT I'd look in and tell you, missus,” said Jonathan, at Martha Male's door that night, “that 'Scilla's going to the 'house' on Friday, and so 'Drew needn't come on her at all.”

Martha Male did not quite enter into the delicacy of Jonathan's feelings for his friend.

“Well, happen on her he'll have to, come sooner, come later. But I'm glad she's a-goin'. It might upset him like, seein' the

gal goin' about. He did keer for her, did 'Drew."

"I think we needn't tell him straight off that she's gone—and to the 'house,'" said Jonathan, trying to smooth the way as far as possible for his mate. He knew Martha was not reticent, nor very sensitive, though she had as kind a heart as ever beat under a purple cross-over.

"Bless you, lad, he ain't made o' sugar-candy. But it's not me as'll want to put him out the first night he sits aside us agin. But I'm glad you've looked in, Jonathan, 'cause I'd somethin' to ast you, and I'll take it a great favour if you'll do it. It ain't so much for me as for 'Drew, and he's ta'en it very hard as you've not been a-nigh him this long time, and he shut up in the 'orspital with his poor bones a-gingerin' together."

Jonathan felt a little uncomfortable, and made some hazy excuse. It satisfied Mrs. Male, however, intent on her request.

“Well, it’s this as I wanted to ast you. ’Drew’s a-comin’ home Saturday, you see, and however he’s to git out I dun know. He can’t walk not many hundred yards yet, he can’t; and to hire a cart from Hepreth ’ud come to a terrible deal, it ’ud. But his father and me we been a-thinkin’ as you is so friendly like with Mr. Falk, that you’d ast him if he’d lend Abra’m the light cart Saturday, and then he’d go fetch ’Drew hisself. Mr. Falk’s so wonderful kind al’ays, I don’t think as he’d disannul us.”

Jonathan hesitated a few moments before he said—

“You had best ask him yourself, missus, I think.”

Martha Male put down her knitting and looked at Jonathan.

“Then you won’t do it for ’Drew, though Mr. Falk makes as much o’ your little finger as of Abra’m and me body and soul put together?”

"I can't do it, missus," said Jonathan.

"Well, then, it's the first time as ever you said 'No' when it was somethin' for 'Drew as you could do. Good-night," she added, indignantly, rising to see him out of the door, "I ain't one as 'll ask twice."

"I'm sorry I can't, missus," said Jonathan. "I'd do it if I could, but I've a good reason why I can't."

Martha Male shut the door, and sat down, ruffled and disconcerted, to her stocking.

"Don't be so hasty, old 'oman," said her husband. "He telled 'e as he'd got a reason. If he hadn't he'd do it for 'Drew."

"Oh, he's not as he used to be to 'Drew, he isn't. Not been a-nigh him since ever such a time. There's somethin' as there usedn't to be about Jonathan. And I take this very unkind, I do. However 'll my poor boy get out Saturday?" And Martha Male began to cry.

“He’ll get a ‘lift’ easy—no fears o’ him,” said Abraham. “There’s enough troubles for every day wi’out hailing them that belongs to the day after to-morrow, or next week. One ’ud think ’Drew had got another mischief, instead of comin’ home hale and hearty, with his leg as whole as yourn.”

Meanwhile Jonathan was going home troubled and puzzled. Were these the sort of difficulties he was to find himself in every day? Martha misunderstood him; perhaps ’Drew would too, and think him changed and unkind. He could not blame ’Drew if he did. And yet his tongue was tied, not only by his promise to Mr. Falk, but by his own conviction that to tell what he could tell, would be the worst thing possible not only for Hepreth and Mr. Falk but for Andrew himself.

And as to asking Mr. Falk to send for Andrew, Jonathan felt it was impossible.

The very idea stuck in his throat. If Mr. Falk would have done it a hundred times over (and perhaps he would not have liked to refuse), Jonathan felt that a hundred times over he would have to decline it. Send for 'Drew in Mr. Falk's cart, knowing what *he* knew? It would be an insult to his mate, and none the less an insult because 'Drew would not *know* it had been offered to him. "I'd carry him out on my back a deal sooner," said Jonathan. And he went, still troubled and worried, to bed.

So Saturday came round, and nothing had been sent to meet Andrew. He was to have had a letter from home if anything could be arranged for him; and when no letter came, and the morning broke clear and sunny, for all it was November, he put his best foot forward, and with a comforter round his neck, a stick in his hand, and a few clothes in a bundle in the other, he started to walk part of the way home at

least, depending on a "lift," which he was safe enough to get. He had only had a few turns in the hospital garden since the day when he had been carried along this road, sick with pain and the jolting of the cart.

How sweet the air seemed ! It was fresh touched by the hand of winter. And the trees he had left in leaf were bare, and only a robin here and there twittered from the hedges. But to breathe and be free again was sweet. How much sweeter it might have been ! In other days, home-coming from Hepreth, or from any long day's work, meant a good tea at home, at the clean table with its snowy cloth ; and afterwards, a walk with 'Scilla.

Now, there would be the mother, the home, the clean cloth, the tea, but not the walk with 'Scilla. And the lack of this last seemed to take the sweetness out of it all. His heart was sad and heavy. There

was only the sense of being free in body, the sense of returning health to carry him along. And hidden in his heart, hardly known even to himself, Andrew carried a foolish hope—the hope of seeing 'Scilla.

He did not reason with himself as to what would be best for him ; he did not argue that it would be worse than useless for him to see her now. He only was aware that something led him on to Shelbourne, as it had led him home so many times in old days, in spite of the sad heart he knew he carried. Hoping against hope, without hope,—that was Andrew's case.

Just outside Hepreth he halted, and sat down on the kerbstone to rest. A long white building stood on the left of the road, facing him as he sat. The windows were large and in straight rows; painfully straight rows, where all beauty had given place to order. Four straight white walls enclosed a square yard in front of the building.

Four other straight walls adjoined these four. They divided the space into two bare courts; and these divided the house also into two parts. There was a bench in each court. On one bench sat a row of men like sparrows, all alike, in fustian and blue shirts. On the other bench sat three women, each with a baby in her arms. They also were all alike—in blue-striped dresses and white caps.

The men had some pebbles on the bench, and were trying to play a game with them. The very dropping of a pebble was a relief in that awful monotony of men all alike, walls all alike, doors and windows all alike. The pebbles were not all alike, when you came to look closely at them. Perhaps that was why the men liked to play with them, and handle them.

The women sat looking at their babies: three little babies, all alike. Thin red arms and legs, thin little blue cotton dresses,

thin oiled flaxen hair upon every head.
To the mothers no doubt they did not look
all alike, which was well.

That was Hephreth workhouse.



CHAPTER XX.

“AY, I SAW HER.”

BUT the great white building, and the bare walls, had no associations for Andrew. Thank God none of his kith and kin had ever been there. He looked at it as respectable folk look at prison windows, wondering at and pitying those behind the bars.

Then he took up his bundle again, that he had laid down beside him, and limped along slowly, looking out for some friendly traveller on the road who would give him a “lift.”

He was not long in being overtaken by an empty cart that belonged to Mr. Jonas, the landlord of the Red Inn. The carter was well known to Andrew, and there was no demur about taking the limping wayfarer up. On the contrary, the old man got down and helped Andrew in, setting a heap of empty sacks in the corner for him to sit upon, and stretching his broken leg out gently along the cart.

“It’s best for ’e to sit at the top like,” he said, as he settled Andrew into his corner with his back to the horse; “there’s more hills to go up ’an there is to go down ’tween this and Shelbourne—and it ain’t pleasant to be lyin’ down feet up’ards. Tell me if I goes too fast, and jolts you. There ain’t no hurry as I knows of.”

They did not go too fast. At every hill old Tom got out and led his horse, or walked beside it, meditating on simple things, or perhaps on nothing; and Andrew watched

Hepreth lying farther and farther behind him, till the tall white hospital lost itself among the smaller houses, and in the blue veil of smoke.

He was very tired even after his short walk. His limbs were far wearier, from long inactivity, than the stout legs of old Tom would be at night, when he threw his smock off after a hard day's work, and a journey to Hepreth and back : so he lay in the cart and did not care to speak, hardly to think. He watched the hedges slipping by, the bare fields, the straight chalk road. Sometimes he watched the pattern worked on old Tom's smock, when the carter fell a little behind at some hill. Most of all he looked at the pale blue sky, in which a pale November sun was riding ; the bare elm branches stretched across it ; and below, the underwood of bramble, not bare yet, but brown and red, and many-coloured, clothing the copses for yet a little while.

And now and then there was a traveller to pass upon the road. The Hepreth photographer, with his little donkey-cart, going out to "take views," now that the trees were bare, and the beauties of brick-work and stone showed at their fullest their naked perfections. A woman or two coming from market. Ben Bower, with one of Mr. Falk's drays full of casks, going in to Hepreth.

Ben opened his big eyes when he saw 'Drew. 'Drew was the hero for the time being of Shelbourne.

"Be you better?" he called out, waking up out of his astonishment, but not waiting to hear the answer, though he turned round upon a cask and stared after the hero for a while.

If he had waited he would not have heard the answer. Andrew made no answer.

For, just then, past the cart went a

woman's figure. Tall, girlish, slight, in a soft brown shawl that was wrapped round—not her only, but something she carried in her arms. Her face was bent over something ; she was peeping at it under the corner of her shawl.

She stood still a moment, not noticing the cart at all : but turning sideways, with her bright lovely face set against the straight white road, she put her foot upon a stone, while she lifted the little bundle on her arm, drew the shawl closer round it, pressed it nearer to her heart, stooped once and kissed it, then turned away from Shelbourne, and walked on.

And Andrew lay still in old Tom's cart, and knew that it was 'Scilla that had passed him by. And yet he never moved, had never tried to move. The numbness that had been in his tired limbs seemed to have crept higher, to his heart. A dimness came over his eyes. The white road, the

elm branches, the shifting hedges, the woman's figure, all passed out for a moment in darkness. He knew the feeling, for he had felt it once before, when they had lifted him out of the cart at Hepreth hospital, after his leg was broken. And he roused himself, with a strong effort, when he knew now that, in womanish fashion, he was "faint." He was not himself yet, he said to himself, as he took hold of the side of the cart and gripped it.

And just then, looking to the left, he saw that they were passing a deep glade in the copse, where in spring the blue hyacinths used to grow. They were all gone now; only the withered bents covered the ground with a thin shroud-like covering.

Andrew was no poet; but the thought came across him, could this be the same world that was God's world in May?

"I'll walk from here, master, and thank you," he said to Tom, when they reached

the Red Inn, "if you'll give me a hand out of the cart. My leg's wonderful stiff still."

"I'll hand you when you're at your own door," said Tom, imperturbably driving on.

All Shelbourne looked out of its windows to see 'Drew, the hero, coming home. Little children, playing on the green, rushed to their mothers, and cried shrilly that "'Drew was a-comin' past."

Martha Male, who had been watching at the window for two hours, and was very uneasy, had, of course, happened to go into the bakehouse just as Andrew arrived. So on his stick he hopped through the house, and out at the back door, where he came upon his mother unexpectedly.

"If I didn't think as it was the ghost of him, and not him hisself, I'm not a woman alive," she said afterwards to a neighbour. "Ill in the 'orspital he did look ; but to see him when he comed home, it 'ud have

turned a cask o' beer, let alone his mother. His hands, they's like a babby's hand—and a babby as has been brought up by the bottle, too. And as for his arms and legs, there isn't a blessful morsel o' flesh on 'em, not as you could pinch with tweezers. His bones, they is gingered together ; but, dearie me, it's took all his life and flesh, too, to do it. That it has, I'm sure."

No one doubted Martha Male when she said, decisively. "*That it has, I'm sure.*" Her words carried weight with them ; perhaps because her person was so portly. No one likes to contradict a large woman, however easily she may be melted to tears.

There is little need to say Martha Male cried for a full half-hour while she looked at Andrew. Then she bethought herself of his already over-cooked dinner.

More to please his mother than because he was hungry, he eat some of the hard

suet pudding she put before him, with a slice of pork.

And afterwards, when she had tied a clean spotted handkerchief round his throat, and had got him to "set his feet upon the fender," she allowed him, as she expressed it, to "humour hisself."

And so till tea-time he sat over the fire, tired and silent. A cup of tea did him good, and he roused a little at his father's home-coming.

"But he's wonderful down-hearted, he is," said his mother. "I hope as Jonathan 'll cheer him up a bit; for all he was so unkind about the 'lift' from Hephreth."



CHAPTER XXI.

"THE LITTLE RIFT."

NONATHAN did not hurry home from his forge that evening, nor from home to the Males' house.

He wanted to see Andrew again, and yet he could not help wishing to avoid it. If there were to be a cross-fire over his head all the evening on the one painful subject, he felt he could hardly make the evening short enough. He felt he *could* not look ignorant when he knew everything. He had never been schooled to act a part, and he hated the thought of having to do

it now. Of all things he hated the feeling of not being open and at his ease with Andrew. His great hope was that Martha Male would forbear to speak on the subject of 'Scilla till Andrew was stronger. But it was a piece of discretion he hardly dared to expect.

When his mother had cleared away the tea things, and he had lifted the great black kettle off the fire, and filled the little wooden tub for her to wash up the cups and plates, as he did every night, Jonathan felt he had better go.

His heart warmed as he went up the Males' garden path at the thought of seeing 'Drew. For a moment he forgot that there was anything to fear or avoid, as he knocked at the door and saw his mate's honest face, pale and thin, but still the same face, lifted up and turned towards him from the corner by the fire.

A quiet light came at the same time

over the pale face at the sight of Jonathan. He stretched out his hand to meet the large brown sinewy hand held towards him.

“Well, 'Drew.”

“Well, Jonathan.”

That was all, but it was quite enough.

Mrs. Male drew forward a chair. “Take a seat, Jonathan,” she said, wiping her eyes, and forgetting her resentment when she saw her boy and Jonathan together again.

Jonathan sat down.

“How do you think he looks?” asked Martha, scrutinizing Andrew, who sat looking into the fire, rather bashful at being so much considered.

“He don't look much of a man yet, missus,” said Jonathan. “We can't expect it yet.”

And his eyes fell again on the thin strip of a hand that was lying nerveless on Andrew's knees,—a hand that, a few weeks

ago, had been as strong, though not as large as his own.

They talked on in the twilight for an hour or so, but there was no mention of 'Scilla. Jonathan had more respect for Martha than he had had before. His mother could hardly have behaved with more discretion — his dear little deaf mother who never did the wrong thing, and was always as meek and gentle as if she had.

The talk was not very interesting : about Mr. May's cough and Mr. Byles's last symptoms, the new wall the squire was putting up in Sidman's Acre, and such village gossip. Jonathan noticed that it seemed to tire Andrew very much. He sat patiently listening, only easing his leg now and then, or giving the fire a stir for a little variety. But his face looked weary and worn, and he never joined in the conversation.

“ ’Drew ought to be in his bed, missus,” Jonathan said at last.

“ The church clock ’s a-gone eight,” said Abraham, quite ready for bed, but feeling cautiously for his wife’s opinion. She was playing a little game to-night, and woe be to him if he spoiled it by any false step.

A very innocent game it was, only to leave Andrew and Jonathan together. She felt sure it would do the boy good to have a talk with his friend. One had always been sent for when the other was in trouble, since they were boys.

But Jonathan nearly spoiled the game—perhaps not altogether innocently — by rising to say good-night when Mrs. Male had moved to light her candle.

A frown and a wink sent him straight back into his seat. There was something almost threatening in the frown. Jonathan did not quite understand it. Only

this much he understood, that it was as much as his place in his hostess' esteem was worth to refuse to sit down again.

“You can have a crack, you two, when the old folks is a-gone to bed. 'Drew, you'll latch the door after Jonathan, that's a good boy.”

“'Drew's very tired,” said Jonathan. “I don't think it'll be kind to keep him out of his bed.”

But Andrew looked up and met his friend's eyes. His face said as plainly as words could, “Don't go !” And Jonathan stayed on, and closed the door behind the old folk as they went up the stair together.

“How'll you get up ?” asked Jonathan, looking at 'Drew's weak leg. “I can't help you if you've got to lock the door after me.”

'Drew pointed over his shoulder. “They've made me a bed here on the

mattress. It'll save my leg a few days. Sit down, won't you?"

Jonathan sat down again, and they both looked into the fire.

"I've been sorry not to come to see you, 'Drew," Jonathan began; "I couldn't go to Hephreth very well of late."

'Drew said nothing.

"I hope you didn't take it unkindly," he went on. "I'm afraid the time was long while you were in there."

"It *was* long," said 'Drew. Then he was silent a minute before he said: "Time seems heavy when your heart's heavy. It seems a sight of years since I went in that place."

After another pause he went on: "The thing I want for now's to get well, and get about again, that I may bottom this as has happened sin' I been gone. You've not heard nothing more, I suppose?" he asked, looking up anxiously.

Jonathan looked into the fire and said nothing.

Andrew believed he was lost in thought about who could have wronged 'Scilla, and he liked Jonathan none the less for it. If he had heard anything, Jonathan would have been the first to tell him.

"And if you're the same man as you used to be," Andrew continued, "you'll help me too. For if he's alive on this earth, I'll find him and make him suffer for it." His thin lips trembled as he spoke.

"You haven't seen her, Jonathan, have you?" he asked presently; "not of late?"

"Not very late," said Jonathan. He was too much occupied with thinking how he should answer Andrew's more momentous questions, to know quite what he was

He forgot that he had seen 'Scilla week. This time he *was* absent, and did not know it.

I've seen her," said Andrew.



The tone of his voice called Jonathan back to himself.

"You've *seen* her?" he repeated, in astonishment. 'Scilla was to have been in the workhouse the day before. How could Andrew have come across her?

"On the road to-day. She was out walking. She didn't notice me. She never looked at nothing—only at the"—he stopped a minute, and then as if he forced himself to say it—"the child."

He was shading his face now with his hand, partly resting his forehead on it. There was a tenderness and a shame in his voice that went straight to Jonathan's heart. He sat quite silent now. It seemed as if everything had been summed up in that one word that he had wrung from his lips: all the past, the shame, the hopelessness of the future, *that*, standing between him and his lost love.

"'Drew," said Jonathan, feeling he must

speaking, "I'd give up thinking and fretting about who it is. It's past and done, and it can't be mended. It won't make it lighter to bear, if you find out who it is. I wish you'd be ruled by me in this."

He spoke more earnestly than he thought. He could not help being anxious to dissuade his friend from his worse than useless quest.

Andrew looked up at him with a mixed expression of surprise and pain.

"It 'ud do me *this* good," he said, sternly, "that it 'ud ease my mind to give him—not his deserts, for I couldn't do that—but the nearest thing to it as I could do. It 'ud ease my mind to call him what he is—the biggest villain as ever crawled this earth. It 'ud ease my mind—Jonathan, you've never had a sweetheart," he said suddenly, his voice falling with a kind of pity for his friend, upon whom no 'Scilla had ever smiled.

“’Drew, you’ll be making yourself ill,” said Jonathan, rising to go ; “ I’d best be going.”

“ Maybe you had,” he answered, wearily. And the two friends parted, and neither was happy. What had come to Jonathan, asked Andrew, that he would not help him to find out the man who had ruined ’Scilla?



CHAPTER XXII.

EVER WIDENING.

“**H**ONATHAN didn’t stop not long with you,” was Mrs. Male’s comment as she poured out Andrew’s cup of tea the next morning. It was Sunday, and she had both her son and husband to sit down with her to breakfast; but her usual satisfaction at this was a little marred by the fact, or the fancy, that Andrew looked no happier for “easing his mind” to his friend the night before.

Andrew said little in reply, for there was

little to say. But Martha would not let the subject drop.

“He don’t seem to be not as he used to be, don’t Jonathan,” she exclaimed, pouring her tea into the saucer, and sipping it between her sentences. “I can’t get over his not asking Mr. Falk for the light cart to fetch you home. It’s the fust time, as I says to him,—and me a sitting there agin the chimley,—as he ever said nay when I ast him do somethink for you. He didn’t say nothink as how it was, I suppose?” she continued, with womanish pertinacity, seeing that Andrew would volunteer nothing.

“He said he couldn’t do it,” was Andrew’s answer.

“Well, it’s like a man, it is, not to bottom it. My belief is there’s somethink dark and misterous about Jonathan, as I can’t purtend to understand. God forgive me if

I've done him a wrong ; but 'Drew, I can't a help thinkin' it o' times."

"Thinking what?" said 'Drew, setting his cup down and looking wonderingly at his mother.

"Well, look here ; don't go to fly at me before you've heerd what I've got to say. I'm a plain woman, and likes plain goings on. Why is it as Jonathan don't come a-nigh you now same as he used to do ? Why can't he do you a turn as well's he used to could ? Why," she said, lowering her voice, that Abraham, who was dressing upstairs, might not hear her, nor the next neighbour either, "why does he look shamed-like and awk'ard when any one talks about 'Scilla?"

Andrew's face had flushed suddenly.

"You don't mean to say as you think—" he began hotly, a horrible suspicion creeping into his heart in spite of himself.

"I don't speak not without thinking,

'Drew, depend on't," she interrupted him, persuading herself by her own arguments, till what had been till this moment a vague suspicion became almost a certainty.—"It's a strange thing, as the on'y man as folks saw hangin' about Thorne's cottage that very mornin' as ever was when the news got out about 'Scilla, the on'y man was Jonathan ; and what *he* was a-doin' there God A'mighty and himself on'y knows. But in church he wasn't, for I was there with my very eyes. And him that goes there reg'lar every Sunday."

Andrew pushed his chair from the table, and laid down his knife.

"Don't talk no more o' such things," he said ; " I don't believe 'em, and what's more, I *won't*."

"Well, I take it very hard, 'Drew," said his mother, wiping her eyes, and putting her saucer back under its cup, "as you'd take what your mother says to you like that : it

ain't no account to *me* to blame no one, so long as it's not you. But I thought I'd best say my say, and you can do as you pleases."

Andrew thought he was carrying all the trouble he could bear already. It seemed there was another blow yet to be dealt him. He didn't believe it ; he would not believe it. But the seed of suspicion had been sown. He knew that, and it made him miserable.

He took his hat and stick and went out. He could not bear the house longer. It was Sunday, and he had felt he should like to go to church that day ; but he did not know how to go now and sit by Jonathan. If it were untrue—and it must be untrue—what a foul thought he was harbouring against his mate ! If it were true——

Andrew could not bear it longer. Clear it up he must. To Jonathan he could not go. How on the mere suspicion of the thing could he tax him with it ? But to Jael he

could go. She might throw some light upon it. She *must* know more than other folk. She *must* know if there were anything against Jonathan.

It was a hard struggle to him to face the certainty of seeing 'Scilla. But facing this horrible suspicion all the long Sunday through, was even worse, and with all his dread of meeting the love that was lost to him, he carried still that mad unreasonable longing that hopeless love so often carries with it—the longing to see 'Scilla once more.

He went along very slowly. He could hardly have believed he should be able to walk so far at all. But sometimes his thoughts were so unbearable, they hurried him on in spite of himself. Going back to the few events of the past weeks, everything seemed to lend colour to his mother's suspicion.

Jonathan had evaded his questions that

one day that he came to see him, after he had told him of 'Scilla's misfortune. And even when he had broken it to him, how embarrassed, almost ashamed, he had been. He had pushed his chair back ; he had not looked him in the face as he used to do.

And then, he had never come again to Hepreth. Saturday after Saturday had passed, and he had lain and watched the door, and Abraham had come often, his mother sometimes, but Jonathan—never.

His mother noticed Jonathan was changed. Could it be all fancy ? Had he not seen a change in him last night as they sat together—they who were never happier in old days than when they could have a “crack” together ? And last night they had not been at their ease, whatever was the cause of it.

And then, like a wave, there came over Andrew's soul the remembrance of Jonathan's eager words : “ 'Drew, I'd give up

fretting and thinking who it is. I wish you'd be ruled by me in this."

Had there been a meaning in the words, then, that had seemed to Andrew so unintelligible? Was there a key to it all, and had Andrew *found* it?

The perspiration stood upon his forehead—he felt his hand moist on the stick on which he leant.

He was going up the green lane now, stumbling through the cart-ruts, walking with pain and weariness, but still hurrying on. In another moment he was at Josiah Thorne's door.

He lifted the latch; one look into the room showed him 'Scilla was not there.

Jael was. She was sweeping out the little room, in the old thread-bare brown gown, just as in the days that were gone. But her face was not what it had been. Andrew, agitated as he was, was struck by the change in it.

She stopped sweeping, put her broom down, came forward, and taking Andrew by the arm, without a word led him to a seat.

She sat down, too ; and they neither of them spoke for some moments: at length, in answer to something she saw in Andrew's face, Jael said :—

“She's not here, 'Drew. You ain't like to see her. She's gone away for a while.”

Andrew drew a long breath. He did not till then know how much he had dreaded seeing 'Scilla. Another moment, and a reaction came. He did not know before how much he had longed to see her. He began to feel the weariness in his limbs, to know how he had overtaxed his feeble strength.

And as Jael sat silent, looking at him, with that worn, grief-stricken face, his courage gave way. The stick fell from his hand on to the floor, and lay there : and he bowed his head upon the table, laying his

head upon his crossed arms. His shoulders heaved. Jael thought once she heard a sound as of a child's sob. And to her eyes the tears came welling, as she looked at Andrew. She had not thought enough of *his* trouble all this time. She could not have believed he would have felt it so. He had always noticed 'Scilla, but she had not thought any one but she herself could have loved the simple girl so much as this.

Presently she got up and laid her hand on the straight, fair brown hair that fell listlessly over his forehead and his arm. Andrew looked up and remembered himself.

"Don't 'e shame, 'Drew," said Jael, "there's no one here but me."

"I wanted to hear about it, missus," he said, speaking firmly, in his own voice. "Tell me all as you can."

"I knowed nothin' of it," she said. "You knowed a deal more o' her doin's than I did,

'Drew. And, God forgive me, I thought it was you as had ruined her. No one 'ud think it could be no one else. You was the on'y one as ever took notice o' my gal."

"I want to come on him, missus," said Andrew, hoarsely; "I want you to help me find him out."

"I can't help you, 'Drew, my poor boy," she answered, looking compassionately at him, and emphasizing the *I*, which gave Andrew the impression that she was as helpless and ignorant as he was. And as *helpless*, indeed, she was.

There was another silence, and then Jael, afraid of what questions he might put next, said—

"Have you seen Jonathan? He's been wonderful kind, he has, in this trouble."

Andrew looked up eagerly.

"You've seen him then, o' late?"

"See'd him one day this last week. He come up here, very thoughtful like, seein'

about what was to come o' 'Scilla. I'd best tell 'e, 'Drew, as no one hasn't telled ye—'Scilla, she's gone in the 'house' awhile—till so be as fa'der's better—or gone to his grave. I couldn't 'arn the livin', not for 'em all, and me all day with fa'der now. The parish wasn't willin' to give 'Scilla nothin'. They said as she must come i' the 'house.' ”

Andrew was looking dumbly at her; and she went on, trying to smooth it to him.

“ Every one was very kind, they was. I ain't got no faults to find with no one. Mrs. Myse, she were up asking would 'Scilla come to the Place, and they'd give her wage, if she'd do what she could. But she wouldn't not leave the babby. She don't keer for nothin' 'cept that. And Jonathan, he were wonderful kind, he were. There weren't nothin' he wouldn't do for 'Scilla.”

Andrew's heart began to beat fast.

“What—what did he say he’d do?” he asked, hurriedly.

“He said first as his mother ’ud keep her, sooner than she should go in the ‘house.’ But it’s him as ’arns all the money, so it were the same as for him to keep her, poor lad. What’s the matter with ’e, ’Drew? What is it as gives you them hot flushes? Them’s what I feels o’ times here, at my side.” And she put her hand upon her heart.

“It’s nothin’—go on—what was it as Jonathan said?”

“Arter that, he says, says he, as he’d give me somethink for to help me keep ’Scilla; but, Jonathan, says I—” and then Jael broke off, just in time to save the secret.

Andrew had stood up, and was looking for his stick. He raised a very pale face when he had found it.

“Missus, I can’t bear this no longer. I

don't know who's to blame—but there's a terrible thought come in my mind. For the love of God tell me, if you can tell me—is there——”

Jael catching at the letter of the truth, where the spirit could not be given, answered quickly, “*I can't tell 'e, 'Drew.*”

She knew he took it to mean she did not know. But to her it was no lie, since the words were true. How could she be answerable for the meaning Andrew might put upon them?

She had no misgivings as she sent him away with this answer. Poor Jael! she had been prepared for plainer untruths than this, in the cause of her bed-ridden father.

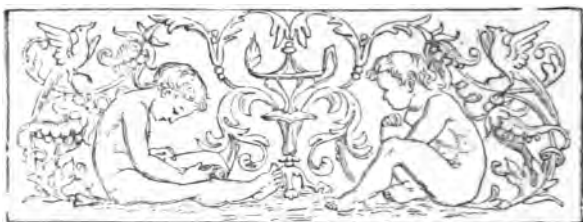
“God knows I wouldn't tell no lies not without no purpose,” she said to herself as she went on sweeping, “on'y to leave fa'der in's bed.”

Andrew walked home as sick at heart as when he came.

No light had been thrown on his terrible misgivings. He could not frame the dread question he had carried in his heart for Jael to reply to.

She had answered it in so far as she could. *She* believed in Jonathan from the bottom of her heart: that was plain.

“And I believe in him, I do—I believe!” cried poor Andrew to himself, as he limped wearily homewards. But the terrible, haunting trouble was still written in his face. How long must he carry it?



CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. BYLES'S END.



HE falling of the leaf had been a hard time for others than old Josiah Thorne, and the many people who had been in trouble in Shelbourne.

Poor Mr. Byles, who had weathered many winters, while every one had said that each would be his last, began this winter to fade in earnest. He shut himself up more and more, providing an assistant to take his school for him. More and more he retired into his comforter

and into his chimney-corner, and more bottles came weekly from the Hepreth chemist.

The washing-stand, the mantelpiece, the chest of drawers, were now thickly tenanted with empty phials; while at least two or three travelled to and fro by the carrier on any stray opportunity, to be filled and re-filled all the week through.

But medicines, even the most powerful, fail at last, and a time comes for the most ardent worshipper of Esculapius when the last bottle is uncorked, the bottle that will never be finished, and that will outlive the frail life it was called in to support.

Martha Male was in her bakehouse one December day, kneading the shapeless lumps of dough, that were to come out of the white heat of the oven light and sweet as bread could be. Andrew was standing by her, leaning on his stick, listlessly watching his mother's plump hands deftly

pinching and shaping the week's loaves. He could not work yet; very little reading tired him, and he was as restless as he was dispirited. It was a change to come into the bakehouse and watch the baking, a thing he had never done since he was a boy.

But a neighbour came in, and broke the monotony of the long morning.

"Martha," she said, "they've been a-lookin' for you everywhere. Master Byles, he's taken bad, and he's a-wanting you. He won't have no one else but you or Jael. a-nigh him, and Jael, poor thing, she can't leave home, not now."

"My comfort!" said Mrs. Male, seeing before her a prospect of many weeks, perhaps months, of waiting upon the school-master, who was always "bad," and never much worse. "My comfort, woman! and 'Drew here at home, and no one to do for him, not if I go out a-nursing of other

folks. Why ever didn't the poor man never marry, to be a-leavin' of himself to other folk, when he should have them as it 'ud be their dooty to do for him? Well," she said, dubbing a plump forefinger into the middle of each doughy loaf, and leaving a clean round hole as if it had been done with a walking-stick, "well, I suppose as I must go. Leave the poor man to die in his bed I can't. It 'ud lie for ever at my door if I did."

She scraped off the dough that had stuck to her fingers with a sharp piece of stick, and giving her hands a rub with her apron, she "set her hat straight," as she expressed it, and went off to Mr. Byles.

Andrew was very glad to see her back by tea-time, flustered and hot, but evidently not so much in demand as she had expected to be.

"He's proper sadly," she said, taking off her pattens, and smoothing down her hair,

from which she had taken her big hat. "But I dun' know as he's like to go off just yet. He's been very nigh as bad before this, and got out of his bed again."

She spread a clean, coarse white cloth on the little table, and arranged the tea-things, and Andrew drew his chair in beside her. Meals were a great event to him now, in his long idle days.

He had cut two slices of bread, and was innocently beginning to eat one, when a look on his mother's face stopped him.

"Whatever's the matter?" he asked.

She had turned half her sleeve down before beginning her tea, when something arrested its further progress, and she sat now with the same arm stretched across the table, pointing at her son's plate, a picture of unyielding fate.

"The matter! Why, to be sure—just look at that there slice of bread?"

"Well—I'm looking," said Andrew.

“And you don’t *see*?” she cried; “why, there’s a coffin sure and certain a-starin’ you in your face!”

“A coffin?” repeated Andrew, feeling very bewildered, and staring round the room with a sense of awe.

“In your bread, you silly,” said Martha. “Don’t you see that there hole in it? That means a coffin, it does. Ah, it’s all very well for young folks like you to laugh, but holes never come in *my* bread wi’out something comin’ of it. Dearie me, I wish I hadn’t got the poor man to send a tiligram to his niece to come and do for him. Do for him no one won’t have to do long, that’s sartin. The tree isn’t a-grow-in’ that’ll make that there coffin; no, and it ain’t been a-growin’ this year or two. And the nails, they isn’t very far off. No, nor yet’s the hammer. No more isn’t the screws.”

Andrew laughed. It was the first time

he had laughed since he came home, but his mother could not forgive him quite, in spite of that.

“ Laugh at me as you may, 'Drew. Jael, she laughed that day as we was a-washin' for Muster Byles, and my soap it slipped three times. And says I, I says, 'Some-think 'll come o' *that*,' says I. And I hadn't not hardly said them words when the neighbours come a-runnin', and says as you had gotten the mischief. You mark me, 'Drew, Muster Byles ain't long for *this* world.”

And from Martha Male's omen, even more than from Mr. Byles's drawn blinds, and the news of his increased illness, the report was spread abroad that the school-master was very near his end. Every tongue in the village was set in motion. He had been so long in the place, that the fact of his death, and the idea that a new master would have to come in his place,

shook the Shelbourne mind to its foundation.

“The doctor he don’t seem to know right what it is,” said one of the men of the knot who always gathered near the Red Inn in the evenings, or by the corner near Jonathan’s forge. “My missus she says she knows what it is. She’s wonderful bad with’t herself o’ times. It’s the wind-spavines and the digestion.”

“That sounds as if it ’ud take a chap off, it does,” said another. “A deal of pain, isn’t it?”

“Spavines mostly is,” said the first speaker, with authority.

“My missus,” interrupted Abraham Male—and when he spoke every one was silent, for was not Abraham’s wife the one woman that was admitted to “do for” Mr. Byles? and who could know better all about it than she did?—“my missus she don’t see as he’ll get by it. He’s druckened

wonderful this winter, he has. The cold took him and nipped him like."

"I don't never remember him a hale man," said the old shoemaker. "Some-think like the minister, al'ays ailing and fibberty. Muster Snape now, as come afore him—he were a masterful man, he were."

In a few nights they had gathered round the forge corner again.

"Well—he's gone, is schoolmaster. Went about four o'clock, they tells me. Went off very quiet like and still."

"He were al'ays a still man. Never meddled with nobody."

"My missus knew as he'd draw off quick," said Abraham. "The candle went out last night when she were a sittin' up. But I make no 'count o' such things, I don't."

Martha Male wiped her eyes, when she had seen poor Mr. Byles draw his last

breath. They hardly needed wiping, perhaps, but still the action was becoming. At any rate it came naturally to Martha who had been at many death-beds.

The niece from Yorkshire put on a black dress,—which, indeed, she had come provided with, packed up Mr. Byles's effects, stood at his grave, wiped her eyes too, and then started back by train, with a packet of sandwiches, for Yorkshire.

The school door was locked. The children were told they would have holidays, because Mr. Byles was dead. They liked holidays, and they had never cared for Mr. Byles, so they could have but one feeling. The blinds in the master's house were pulled down; the key was given to Mr. May. The next thing was to supply the master's place.

So, with no more mourning than this, poor Mr. Byles was laid in the churchyard, and passed out of Shelbourne life. Thirty

years he had been in Shelbourne, and in those years he had not won the real affection of a single soul.

Deaths like these make us faithless. On some faces immortality is written. But what about the unloved, the unloving, the altogether unlovely, who seem neither to merit punishment nor to be worthy of a higher life?

Yet, after all, the life is as much a wonder as the hereafter can be. Why do some of us grow up unloved, unloving, and unlovely in the same world that bears such noble souls?

The answer is not here. We must wait for it.



CHAPTER XXIV.

A NINE DAYS' WONDER.



HERE is one good thing about gossip in a small place, where incidents are few and far between.

The talk is so strong, so unwearied, so exhaustive, that it soon wears itself out. Everything having been conjectured, and more than everything related, nothing remains to be said—the torrent pours itself out, and dries up.

So that by Christmas the talk about 'Scilla would pretty well have ceased, had no later event come to banish her from the

village memory. But this incident came, in the death of Mr. Byles ; and Andrew's love story and 'Scilla's wrongs were as a page turned over in the annals of Shelbourne.

A far more fruitful subject for conversation was the death of the schoolmaster. For it provided an endless expanse of wonder, supposition, guess, and inquiry as to his successor.

And for all he was so little lamented, it did not seem to be a very easy thing to fill Mr. Byles's place. At least, Christmas came and went by, and January set in and passed over, and the green blades began charitably to clothe the mound that marked the spot where he lay sleeping, before Shelbourne heard for certain that the school would open again on the first day of February, and that the successor was found.

Would he be young and unmarried ? If

so, he would want a charwoman. One or two village matrons who had been jealous of Martha Male's monopoly of Mr. Byles (or, as was really the case, his monopoly of her), looked out for an opportunity of begging Jonathan to speak a word for them to the new comer.

"I speak for you?" said he, smiling. "I don't know what I should have to do with the new master, or what he wants."

"Well, you know, we al'ays see'd you along o' Mr. Byles and Mr. Falk, and them," they argued.

"But I don't see," he would answer, "because I dug about Mr. Byles's roses that I'm to manage the new master's house for him, and settle who's to cook his dinner. Very like I shall never see the inside of that house again."

The women went away incredulous. Jonathan somehow always did get into favour. Whether it was the coat on his

back, or the books he read, or the deal he knew about flowers, or whether it was "a way he had with him," they could not say ; but the fact remained—he made his way with folk, and kept his own way all the time.

Jonathan thought little, and cared less, who was coming to be master. He had been civil to Mr. Byles, and Mr. Byles to him ; but he owed very little of his knowledge to him, and had not enough affection for his memory to be interested in his successor merely as such. He had no brothers and sisters to send to school, so that beyond a hope that the new school-master would teach the generation now growing up better than he had been taught, he did not give the question a thought.

Far less happy indeed were his musings. Between him and Andrew an estrangement had come, that he had at first thought to be only in his own fancy. There could

be no doubt now. Andrew shunned him : and the friends that had always been together now seldom met.

Long days at the forge for Jonathan—long days at his own fireside for Andrew ; for he was much longer in getting back his strength than even the doctor had expected. Christmas came without his attempting to go to work. In January, he tried again, but came home after an hour or two, quite knocked up. The doctor sent him tonics, and said that was all he needed. Martha Male believed that, and tried to force steel and quinine down his reluctant throat twice a day.

Perhaps, if the doctor had seen his patient at all hours, and in all places, he would have doubted a little the use of tonics. If he had seen Andrew bent over the fire through the long evenings with his head upon his hand, and all the strength and light gone out of his eyes ; if he had

seen his expression change fitfully, from sadness to sullenness and back again ; if he had watched him when, in church or on the road, his eyes fell upon Jonathan Cleare, and noted the strange lights and shadows that crossed his face then, the fierce look that came for a moment and then burnt out suddenly into a worn, drawn look of anxiety and pain ; if he had seen all this, the doctor from Hephreth might have saved the carriage of all the bottles of tonic, and prescribed some other cure. Doctors see us as doctors, not as philosophers, and very seldom they can "minister to the mind diseased." And even to his mother, who sat by him day after day, Andrew's true malady was not known. If there was one person in all Shelbourne who should have understood him, it was Jonathan ; and he could not altogether understand. If there was another, it was Mrs. Myse.

Often in her high, bare room, awake

partly from cold, and partly from ill-health, on her little bed in the corner, the patient little widow sent out her tender heart to Andrew Male, the poor lad who she could see was suffering so. She longed to tell him she understood his trouble, but could not. His quiet face and reserved manner kept her aloof; and was not his grief too sacred for handling? So she only showed her sympathy by "the touch of a hand that is warm," and by many prayers offered up in the stillness of long winter nights for this "dear sheep of the fold," as she would call him.

To her, and to her nephew Mr. May, the advent of Mr. Byles's successor was of some importance. And it was because they were so afraid of making a hasty choice, that the place remained long vacant.

At last it was settled.

"You will call and tell Mr. Falk, dear,

of course," she said to Alfred, as he went out one morning, after receiving the final letter that sealed the fate of Shelbourne school.

Mr. May was, of course, going straight to Mr. Falk.

"Mr. Falk," said he, as Sarah showed him into the parlour, "it is finally settled, you will be glad to hear; and here is the letter. You may like to see it. Such a nice tone about it—don't you think so?"

"Won't you sit down, sir? Thank you;" and Mr. Falk leant his elbow on the mantelpiece, and read the letter.

"Very satisfactory, I should say," he said, handing it back. He felt no great interest in the school, but he liked being consulted, and, indeed, was used to it.

"So the school will open on the 1st," said Mr. May, slipping the letter down into his breast pocket, with his long white fingers

Mr. Falk noticed the alpaca coat was very shiny at the elbows.

They had had so many talks about the school and the vacancy, there was nothing more to be said about it. So Mr. May changed the conversation.

“That poor young Male does not seem to pick up much. I have been wondering whether he ought to go into Hepreth on an out-patients’ day, and see Shannon. The little doctor—Pearce, I mean—seems to do nothing for him.”

Mr. Falk expressed surprise, by some indescribable sound.

“I don’t think he has got over his trouble, poor fellow : at least, my aunt thinks so.”

“People in his class of life don’t usually take things so very much to heart,” said Mr. Falk, turning his back to pick up the newspaper, which had fallen off the table, and then arranging the cloth carefully.

“Perhaps,” said Mr. May, doubtfully.

“But Andrew is above the average. It was a mysterious case, certainly. No light upon it whatever. It puzzles one sometimes to know why the Creator lets the innocent suffer, while the guilty flourish like green bay-trees. But, I believe, they ‘have their reward.’ The penalty must be paid, either openly or in secret. Don’t you think so?”

“Look at the swans, sir,” said Mr. Falk, who had walked to the window and thrown it open.

Mr. May looked at the swans as he was desired.



CHAPTER XXV.

THE NEW "MASTER."



HELBOURNE woke up one day, with the wakening earth, to find that Mr. Byles's successor had come. It so happened that Alfred May took cold that morning that he paid his visit to Mr. Falk ; and the hacking cough, that seldom left him, seized him with increased severity. So Mrs. Myse kept him in the house, and hardly dared to leave him for half an hour ; and thus, in the bare ten days that elapsed before the school was to open, nothing transpired in

the village about "him as was a-comin' in Mr. Byles's place." The people hoped light would be thrown on the subject, but Mr. Falk seldom or never gossiped, and there was nothing for it but to wait with patience for the new master to speak for himself.

At last, one eventful Saturday—Monday next would be the 1st of February—it was noised abroad that towards evening a fly had appeared at the school-house door.

"And the wonderful sight o' boxes and bundles as was on the top," said Becky Flight, a gossip of the first water. "Two big uns at the werry least, and as many small uns as I've fingers."

"Did you see 'em?" asked a neighbour.

"Yes, and there was women along o' him, I warrant. Ben Bower he were on the Hepreth road, and he says to Sam, says he, as he see'd women whatever."

"My comfort! so he's merried, and likely got a family!"

Hope dawned for an aspirant charwoman who was standing in the group with her arms a-kimbo. It was twilight, and they had gathered round the well to draw water for Sunday's use—yes, and for that night's use, too, for was not Saturday the great night for soap-chandlers in Shelbourne? People who never washed all the week washed then; but a dirty house, or a dirty face, was a rare thing in the village. The family *might* be large enough, the boxes being so many, and there being a fly and all—the family *might* be large enough, to make the help of a friendly neighbour (at a shilling a day and rations) quite indispensable.

"There's a message come from the minister for the childer to go to the school, and come along of the missus to church, same's they used to go with Muster

Byles," said the mother of a healthy family of eleven—who, as she had handsomely contributed to the population of the village, felt herself to have a right to the earliest information about anything that concerned the rising generation.

"Wi' the missus ? Then he's merried for sartin."

"Well, he might have a sister, mightn't he ?" interposed a mild little woman, who was just carrying off her pail, but waited to hear if there was any amendment to her suggestion.

"The Lord on'y knows," said Martha Male, coming up suddenly, and plunging her pail decisively into the well. The action spoke cutting reproaches to the loiterers, who began each to turn to her pail and disperse, but not till Martha had delivered herself of her opinion. *She* never stood making words—that was what her action said. *She* knew no more than the rest of

them—that was what her words said ; and they implied, moreover, that if she, the respected and the respectable, the mother of Andrew, and the wife of Abraham, knew nothing, the lesser lights of Shelbourne might well be content to be in ignorance.

“ We’ll see him as he goes along of the children to-morrow,” whispered the incorrigible Becky to her neighbour. And though the neighbour made no answer, she secretly determined to be on the look-out, ten minutes before church-time. She would arrange not to be making the beds just at that time to-morrow ; for the bed-room window looked out at the back.

That Sunday morning seemed as if it had robbed a day from April. The air was so soft, with the sense of winter and cold past, and the quickening warmth of a spring sun, that the oldest were cheated into a feeling of renewed youth.

Josiah Thorne lay happily on his bed,

and watched the sweet day from the garret window. He could tell just how the fields would look on such a day : the tender green of the autumn-sown wheat, the rich brownness of the freshly-ploughed furrows, the damp hedges kindling into tiny red buds that held in themselves the full promise of the summer. It must be a cold heart that is not glad at the first stirring of life in the earth—that has no answering throb to the pulsing of the great heart of nature.

It was no hard thing, on such a day, for the women to wait about the open doors and windows, to see the new master taking the children to church. And they had not to wait long for the patter of feet and clatter of voices that announced them. The little things that could hardly be seen for the garden hedges, the naughty little boys with soaped cheeks, the taller girls who sang in the choir, they all came by. And, not walking with dignity afar off, as Mr. Byles used

to walk, but with a child in each hand, and two or three hustling each other to get nearer, came a girl, with as sweet a face as ever looked out from a little grey bonnet, all soft and genial, like the pleasant day.

And after her—no master.

"That'll be his daughter," said Martha Male, as she brushed Andrew's coat, before he went to church. "She's a'most like a lady. And, my comfort! how she do let the children tumble about her! She won't keep her place with 'em, not like that."

The young girl who took the children to church, and marshalled them into their places, sat also among them. It was a trying place for her, for all Shelbourne looked at her with curiosity and surprise.

Little by little, as the service went on, it dawned upon some of them that, after all, there might be no master. Schoolmistresses had been heard of, certainly; but a slip of a girl like this! Well, they thought Mr.

May might have known better—that was all.

“She to manage them masterful boys!” said Becky Flight. “She ain’t no woman, not to speak of, what I call; let alone a schoolmissus.”

But many liked looking at the “slip of a girl” for all that. They did not call her pretty; her face was too still and colourless, in church, whatever it might be outside, for the taste of village folks, who liked maidens to be “fine and stout.” But they could not help watching her face, for all that, and the small hands that were busy finding the children’s places.

Jonathan looked at her, like all the rest. It was a relief to him to see that placid pale face when he turned his eyes from Andrew, sullen and dejected in the corner of the pew opposite him.

Rumour had said Mr. May was going to get a good singer and player. Jonathan

watched to see whether the new mistress sang. But she did not. She only followed the hymns with her head bent.

"Were the master in church, Jonathan?" asked his little mother, when he got home.

"It isn't a master," said Jonathan, putting his hat on the table, and pushing his dark brown hair off his forehead. "It's a mistress."

"What! that young thing as went past, Jonathan?"

"Yes; I heard Mrs. Myse speak to her as I came out."

"How do she look, Jonathan?" persisted the quiet little deaf woman, gently. She had never had a daughter of her own, and she had a strange yearning over the pretty young thing she had seen go past her window.

"Well, she looks," — began Jonathan, "she looks more like you than any one I've seen, mother."

“Oh, Jonathan, lad, she *would* be pleased if she heard you a-sayin’ that !”

And the little woman sighed and smiled together, thinking of the days when she could have looked anything like the new schoolmistress.



CHAPTER XXVI.

MISS LYNN.



PALE face in a grey bonnet, busy little hands finding the children's places—this was all that Shelbourne saw of Miss Lynn for two or three weeks.

But the children prattled about her all the day through, and the mothers began to take a liking to her from what the little ones said.

“ Well, she do amuse 'em, and make the time pass,” they said, “ for all she looks so still and quiet. But as to the learnin', we don't know as how about that.”

Mr. May, who was beginning to go about again now, was quite satisfied on the last point.

"She has a wonderful power with the children," he said to one of the mothers, the village virago, as he came into her house fresh from the school, one blustering March morning. "There is more order than there ever was before."

"Has she *indeed*, sir? you don't *say* so? Well, ye *must* be masterful with the children if ye're to do *anythink* with 'em. I has to flog Eliza Ann many and *many* a time. Julia there, she don't do nothin' without the stick, and she goin' sixteen. Sarah Jane, I brought her up like with the cane. Billy, he don't do *nothink* without his father gives him a cuff on the head. Muster Byles, he never teached 'em their letters to *my* thinkin' all along o' not using the stick reg'lar."

At every emphasized word it was Mrs. Bellar's habit to shake her head and her

eyes fiercely. But the energy with which she gave forth each word was fierce. She was a fierce and terrible woman altogether, as Sarah Jane, Eliza Ann, and Billy could all testify. It was supposed that Mr. Bellar could also have testified to this fact. But either from motives of caution, or from real admiration of his stronger (if not better) half, he always defended his virago against all attacks.

Mr. May had once mildly remonstrated with him about his wife's constant quarrels and improper language.

"Tell you what it is, sir," said the little man, valiantly, "she's got a bit of a temper, sir, but she's a woman, sir, as *won't* be trampled on by *no* worm."

Mr. May tried now to explain to Mrs. Bellar that there were other influences than the stick and the fist which Miss Lynn used with effect. But it was a strange tongue in the ears of Mrs. Bellar. Sarah

Jane, Eliza Ann, and Billy had defied the power of the cane, and what power could there be that they would not defy if these had failed?

“It seems strange they should both be women,” the curate thought to himself as he looked at the hard, bad countenance of the woman before him, always washing and never clean, always ordering and never obeyed, always asking and never satisfied, and thought of the girl—for he could call her no more—he had left in the school, keeping order without any trouble, hardly raising her voice when she spoke to the children—a hundred restless little children, who had learnt obedience and discipline in a few weeks’ time.

“It is the most wonderful thing I ever saw, Alfred!” said Mrs. Myse. “I was quite frightened when I saw her the first Sunday. She looks such a child.”

And in some ways Daphne Lynn at

three-and-twenty was a child. To begin with, she had a face that never would grow old. At fifteen, she looked just as she did now ; at thirty she would be very little altered. Small regular features, sweet clear frank eyes, very little colour to pass away with the first flush of youth, a small, slim figure—all these things were lasting, as things last in this world. It is a happy thing when beauty is not like the sun on the mountain tops, that passes off with the early morning, and is no more seen.

But the child-part of Daphne's nature did not show itself readily to the outside world. In church she was the mistress, grave, quiet, with a decided little mouth, and demure ways. The children knew her better. They saw her smiles, and heard a merry laugh break from her sometimes over a mistake or failure. They heard her voice when she started the hymn before they began the day's work, and before it ended.

They saw her slender throat throb like the thrush's, as she sang. They told their mothers "the new missus" was a "*very* good singer."

But naturally reserved and shy, it was at home that Daphne was most herself, and most lovable. Over her work, making her mother's tea, telling her some story of the day's doings, some funny saying of the children ; it was then that the demure little face became radiant, like a child's face ; that the lips parted and the soft eye sparkled, and the girl Daphne took the place of the schoolmistress, Miss Lynn.

"You'll come to church on Sunday, won't you, mother?" she said, one evening, as she set the blind woman's knitting straight, for Mrs. Lynn was blind. "You'll feel well enough by Sunday. There's a seat for you not far from me. Mr. Pedley came and asked if you would like it."

"I'll come, dear," said the old lady, a

little querulously, "if the wind goes down a little. It hurts my eyes so."

When she began to talk about her eyes, Daphne always ransacked her brain for something to distract her mother's thoughts.

"I must tell you how the people look in church, mother. It looks quite different from the church at Holme. It's so full, in the afternoons especially. And you'll like Mr. May's sermons. He speaks from his heart."

"I don't like a church that's crowded," said Mrs. Lynn, despondently; "it makes me nervous. Have you put the stitches on? which pin is it you've put towards me?"

"It's right now," said Daphne. "You've got to turn the heel. There; now you've got it!—Well, and I'm going to tell you about the people."

"I'd rather hear about the place," said her mother, "so as to find the way to

church. What houses are there between us and the church?"

"Why, there's all the village!" said Daphne, "or nearly all. There is only a red place, that looks like an inn, above us. Then below us there comes the school—don't twist your needle, mother, dear—and on this side of the road a row of cottages, and every one has a garden. And on the other side," she went on, rising and looking out under the blind, for she had forgotten what was on the other side, "there is a green field first, just opposite us; and next to that there's a house. Why, it must be a forge; the sparks are flying so, up the chimney, and there is a great light on the road from it. Mr. May said he would ask the blacksmith to call and see the stove. I suppose he meant that blacksmith."

Next day, as Daphne Lynn was standing before the black board, with a piece of chalk between her fingers, a circle of open-

mouthed children round her, a knock was heard at the school door.

"Open it, please, Billy. Isn't your name Billy?"

Billy, the son of the virago, opened the door obediently, without any cuff on the head. He seemed proud to do it—proud to be spoken to so civilly. He nearly twisted off his arm, in its ragged coat-sleeve, trying to get the handle turned quickly.

"Please, ma'am—it's Jonathan."

"Jonathan?" said Daphne, turning to one of the elder girls, inquiringly.

"It's Jonathan Cleare, the blacksmith. He's come ar'ter the stove, ma'am."

Daphne went to the door herself.

"Please come in, Mr. Cleare."

"I can come again, if I'm disturbing you, ma'am," he said, taking off his hat. "But Mr. May, he told me to call about the stove."

"You are not disturbing us. Will you

look at it now ? Silence, children. Slates out !”

Jonathan went down on his knee, to look at the stove.

“I could do it in a few minutes,” he said, standing up, almost afraid to break the awful silence that the young girl who stood beside him had brought about by a word and a look. He had never seen anything like this in Mr. Byles’s time.

“Well, they shall say grace, if you please,” said Daphne ; “and then they can go out of your way. It is just twelve o’clock.”

“Grace !” said Daphne, without altering her voice.

All the eyes were squeezed up in a moment. Some of the faces puckered up with the eyes. All the little hands were folded tightly and reverently, while Miss Lynn said, in a clear voice, that had a subduing hush about its very tone—

“Father, we ask thee to sanctify these things to our use. Amen.”

She pointed to the door, and the stream of children passed out, bursting, like freed larks, into a jubilee of voice and song as soon as they had crossed the threshold.



CHAPTER XXVII.

AND THE HOME SHE LIVED IN.



RS. LYNN kept a little servant-maid to look after her while Daphne was at school. She came in for the day and went away at night. And the handmaiden Daphne had chosen was none other than Eliza Ann, the daughter of Mrs. Bellar.

There were pretty, neat, truthful-eyed girls in the school who would have done far better, and Daphne would have chosen one of those. But the children of the virago took her compassionate heart by

storm. Billy's life should be happy, at least in school-hours ; Eliza Ann might be reformed if she were well used, well trained, and well fed.

She had now an ill-used, untidy appearance : her colourless flaxen hair was always tangled, and her dress awry. Her eyes were like her mother's — the fierceness stamped out, but the deceit left. She could not look Daphne in the face, if she pressed her hard for the truth—that is, if Daphne intimated that she knew her to be lying. But if she were quite certain her young mistress was not likely to be able to test the accuracy of her statement, she would lie roundly. Not only this, but such an adept in lying was Eliza Ann, that she put on a look of the most extreme earnestness and truth at those times when she was farthest from it.

Eliza Ann had only been a few days in Mrs. Lynn's service when Jonathan came to mend the stove. Daphne had tamed her

in outward appearance : the tangled hair was confined under a cap, and there was some attempt at a collar and an apron. Daphne was full of hope : this was but the beginning of changed days for Eliza Ann Bellar. Already the young schoolmistress was revolving in her mind the chance of procuring a really good place for the servant, who she foresaw would soon be above the low wages and humble place her mother could afford to give her. The first cloud came when Jonathan was still on his knees by the stove.

Miss Lynn was moving about, opening the windows to let the fresh February air in, and looking through the wet copies left open on the desks.

A rap came at the half-open door.

"Please, 'am, missus says as she wants to see you. She's awantin' Mr. Cleare in the house."

Wanting Mr. Cleare in the house? They

had settled to keep to themselves as much as possible : why should her mother want to ask the blacksmith in ?

Daphne went over to see her mother.

“ It’s the tap in the cistern I want him for,” said the blind woman, querulously. “ That girl will drive me out of my mind, if I’m to be left alone with her every day. I heard the water running away all the morning ; and, you know, in summer they say that well gets dry. She’s done something to that tap, I’m certain.”

“ Go and fetch Mr. Cleare,” said Daphne, to Eliza Ann, who was standing stolid and sulky in the passage.

Jonathan came in, brushing his feet carefully on the door-mat.

The house was so changed he hardly knew it.

“ I suppose you know this house well,” said Miss Lynn, smiling. She was spreading a white cloth on the table, and putting two

clean plates and glasses upon it. Her face was still flushed from the fatigue and exertion of teaching. She had a tired look about her forehead, but no ill-humour about her delicate mouth or in her gentle earnest eyes.

"Yes, ma'am, I knew it well in Mr. Byles's time. It's changed, though—very much changed since then."

"I did not like the paper," said Daphne, "so I have papered it myself."

Jonathan saw a paper that he had not noticed before; it gave just a soft atmosphere to the room, nothing more. Then he remembered a bright red-brown paper, with blue and scarlet spots, that had reigned in Mr. Byles's time.

He did not say anything. He only knew the room and the house were changed from meaningless gloom, to freshness, and light, and warmth.

A table stood in the low window, a tall flower-glass was on it, a few books near it, a

work-basket, and little thimble. As Daphne moved about, a branch of something green fell from the glass. She replaced it carefully. Jonathan noticed that the way she put it in made the vase look pretty at once ; that every leaf had its meaning.

A little hyacinth stood in a pot on the window-sill, trying to break into bloom. Miss Lynn looked at it lovingly, and moved it into the sunshine. She said nothing, for she never spoke to strangers freely about the things she loved best ; and flowers were very near to her heart. She was half ashamed of her childish love for them. She would not have told any one how she longed for the time of the daisies and primroses to come—how often they came before her, as she stood before the ugly black board in the bare schoolroom.

But Jonathan noticed that she had not one bloom, one touch of bright colour in the green nosegay in her tall glass. It

could not be that she did not care for flowers, when she looked at the budding hyacinth like that. It could but be that she had no means of getting any.

If he had only been on such terms with Mr. Falk as to ask a favour of him, Jonathan knew of a little greenhouse that he had had a deal to do with, and there he could have got Miss Lynn a few flowers.

But he could not ask Mr. Falk a favour, so he said nothing, but turned to mend the cistern.

As he went out that morning, through the garden, he looked at the roses he used to attend to for Mr. Byles. They were well and healthy, putting out tender little green leaves at the top of their dry brown twigs. His care would not be thrown away. Miss Lynn would have flowers for her tall glass by-and-by; she would care for the roses.

"That's a nice young man," said Mrs.

Lynn, feeling for the dinner that Daphne had cut up for her, with her fork. "I'm sure I'm thankful to him for stopping that leak. It's worried me so all the morning. Between that and the girl I have no peace."

"Is she doing anything wrong, mother?" asked Daphne, looking distressed. "I *hoped* so she was getting on."

"She never speaks the truth except by mistake ; she upsets everything she comes near if it's under a ton weight ; and when she walks about it shakes me nearly to pieces. That's all that's the matter with her."

"I'll speak to her, mother," said Daphne, "if you'll have a little patience, just at first."

Daphne was young still, and easily disheartened ; but because she was young she was also very sanguine. She asked Eliza Ann in to have some dinner, and

then showed her how to wash up the plates without a noise and clatter.

The two plates went through Eliza Ann's hands and the wash-tub without breaking; and Daphne took heart and went back to the school, feeling happier.

It was lucky for Miss Lynn's peace of mind that she did not see the look of surprise and disapprobation on Jonathan Cleare's face, at the sight of a daughter of the well-known house of Bellar, established as servant in the schoolmistress's home. What good could ever come of any dealing with that lot?

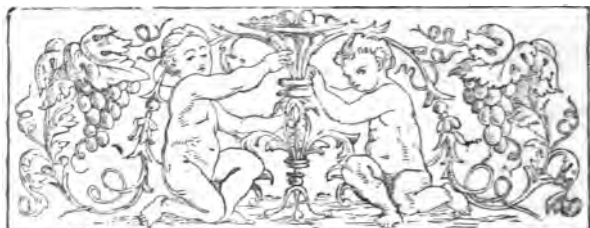
"You're late, Jonathan," said his mother, when he got home. "I thought maybe you weren't comin' to yer dinner."

"I had some odd jobs to do," said he, going to the window.

"Won't you come now and eat something, Jonathan?" pleaded the little woman—"There's nothink amiss with the

flowers, is there? I've watered 'em reg'lar."

"No, there is nothing amiss," said Jonathan, coming to the table and sitting down. He had been looking for any sign of buds on his geraniums, but he was afraid it would be a long while before there was a bloom to cut.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TIME OF THE SINGING OF BIRDS.



HE turning of the year is very gradual : and yet in every spring there is one day that seems *the* herald of the new birth; one day, when the air is so soft, the singing of the birds so jubilant, the sky so cloudlessly blue, and the heart so light, there can be no doubt that the winter is over and gone. The yearly miracle has come round : the earth, that was dead, like Lazarus is alive again, and every living thing is thrilling to the new stream of life that is flooding the

world. And it is such an unfading, untiring joy. Solomon's heart leapt to it nearly three thousand years ago ; and Daphne Lynn's heart leaps to it to-day.

The dream of winter has passed by for all in Shelbourne. To Mr. May, with his cough and constant ailments from being out in all weathers ; to Mrs. Myse, who has lain awake so many nights from cold, while the wind has moaned round the big deserted Place, and whistled mournfully through the unfurnished rooms and carpetless passages ; to 'Scilla in the Hepreth workhouse, watching the large flakes of snow that drifted past the window and settled in the desolate court, and turning with a shiver to the infant in her arms ; to Andrew, to whom the winter had been the longest and saddest season he had ever known, how sweet and welcome was the warmth and the sense of spring !

It might be cold again, thought Mrs.

Myse, stepping about in goloshes between the damp flower-beds, picking crocuses and pale garden primroses, but it could not be winter again for many months to come. And before that—why both Alfred and she might have gone home, she thought, as she looked across the park and the pond, and past Aaron Falk's house, to the churchyard lying in the sun at the foot of the grey steeple. Not that she was unhappy : there was much to make life beautiful and pleasant, and it was hard to think of dying on a day like this.

“Children,” said Miss Lynn, after the morning lessons were over, “would you like to come out in the fields to have your dinner to-day, instead of playing in the school yard? we could pick some primroses.”

There was a universal shout of assent. The decorum of school hours gave way to a joyful prattle and chatter.

All the baskets were dragged out of the shed, all the hats and cloaks tied on.

Two little tinies were struggling with their garments, one trying to push his arms into a little great-coat, the other to fasten in a loose string into her hat. Miss Lynn pulled on the great-coat and buttoned it.

“What do you say?”

“Thank you, mum.” And the rosy little man ran off shouting after his comrades, kicking up his heels in wild delight.

The other little one, sickly and white, was standing by the porch, still struggling with the hat. A faded red ribbon was in her hand, a large pin in her mouth. She lifted melancholy brown eyes to Miss Lynn’s face.

“Poor little woman!” said Daphne, looking compassionately at the thin little hands and pale cheeks. “Is your string loose? What a terrible pin! Is that all you have to fasten it with?”

“’Es, ma’am,” in a timid whisper.

“It must hurt your head. If you fell down it would run into you. Come into the house and we will put a stitch in.”

The little child held out its hand and followed obediently.

“There,” said Daphne, when the stitch had been put in ; “now you can tie the hat as tight as you like, and roll in the grass all day without hurting yourself, and play with the others.”

The child looked up wonderingly. Roll in the grass all day ? Play with the others ? She did not understand what such things meant. Her little life had been all sitting still in the chimney corner, hungry and cold ; or standing, colder still, outside the door till her mother had told her she might come in again. Not her own mother ; you could see that in the child’s face. The father had married again lately, a rough, heartless, low woman, who used the child

as a messenger, or as nurse to her healthy baby, and turned it out of doors at other times.

“Where’s your dinner?” asked the schoolmistress, as she tied on her own bonnet, and opened the door to go out, having first seen that Mrs. Lynn had got hers, without any breaking of plates and upsetting of glasses by Eliza Ann.

The child put its wasted hand into its pocket, and drew out a dry crust of bread.

“Child!—you don’t mean that’s all your dinner?”

Daphne pushed her hand into the pocket herself, to make certain. As she turned it out, a few crumbs fell on the floor. The child stooped down, wet its finger and picked them up one by one, putting each into its mouth, and smacking its lips in pleased content.

“Oh, little one,” said the schoolmistress, the tears coming into her eyes (and

Daphne's tears did not often come), "you shall have some better dinner if you wait a minute."

She cut a piece of cold meat, and some bread and cheese, and put it in the child's hands. It looked up hesitatingly into her face.

"Yes, you may eat it now, as fast as you like, as we go along. We must run, though, or we shan't catch the other children."

But the child's legs were so weak it could not run. They followed the merry voices of the children down the village. Some of the elder girls were waiting at a gate near the church.

"Please'am, we wants to goo in here. The vi'lets is beautiful, all under the big trees."

"But may we go in? Whose field is it?" asked Miss Lynn.

"Please 'am, it's Mr. Falk's field, and he al'ays lets us goo in."

"I think you had better ask leave first,"

said Daphne, who had an impression that the brewer was a great autocrat, and much to be respected. "I will go to the door with you two elder girls, and ask if we may."

Sarah opened the door, and then ran to look for her master.

Mr. Falk appeared immediately.

"Won't you walk in?" he said, politely.

"No, thank you, sir," said Miss Lynn.

"We only wanted to know if there is any objection to the children going into your field to pick violets."

"Oh dear no! which field?" said the brewer, conveying delicately to Miss Lynn the fact that he was lord of many fields in Shelbourne.

The school-girls explained.

"Oh certainly," said Mr. Falk. He took his hat from a peg, and brushing a little malt from his coat-sleeve, followed the schoolmistress, and opened the gates.

They talked a little as they went towards

the field, the two school-girls falling behind them.

“ You are most welcome at any time to take them into any of my fields,” he said, as he held open the last gate, leading into the meadow itself. “ And I hope you will some day do me the pleasure of looking into my house. I don’t know whether Mrs. Lynn is a lover of flowers. I have a nice garden, and a pretty show in my small green-house, if you care for such things.”

“ Oh, have you ?” said Daphne, eagerly. “ I should like very much to see them. My mother is blind, but she would like to smell the flowers.”

“ Any day then, and any hour you may like to name,” said Mr. Falk, “ I shall be at your service—would to-morrow——”

“ Saturday would suit me best,” said Miss Lynn, “ because that is a holiday.”

“ Then next Saturday—about two ?” said Mr. Falk.

"Thank you — if my mother is well enough. I think it would do her good. I know she would enjoy it. We are very much obliged to you."

Mr. Falk took off his hat, and went back to his brewery. And Miss Lynn, sitting down on the driest grass she could find, under a large elm-tree, took a reel of thread from her pocket, and began tying up violets.

"Oh, but I don't mean them all to be brought to me," she said, as child after child rushed up with its hot hand full, and threw them in her lap.

They all stood still, their faces falling.

"Do you *like* best to give them to me, children?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am!" said a chorus of voices.

"Then I like them," said Daphne. She did not thank them, but they all understood the pleased look in her eyes.

"And won't you pick violets, too?"

she said, seeing the pale little child was standing at her side alone, the dinner finished, and the wistful look come back to its face.

It looked helplessly at her.

"Poor little thing! you don't know how to play or to pick flowers. Schoolmistress must teach you that by-and-by, before you learn letters. But now you may come and sit on my dress—not on the grass, it is a little damp. Look at these beautiful violets that God has made. Your name is a flower's name, isn't it? Aren't you called Lily?"

"'Es 'am," in a less timid whisper.

"You like dinner better than violets, don't you, Lily?" said Daphne, peeping under her hat, and patting the pale cheeks. "But we need both, I think."

Jonathan Cleare passed by the field that morning, and looked as he passed by.

It was changed times for Shelbourne

School, since 'Drew and he had smarted under the cane together. But he did not think Miss Lynn ought to be sitting on the damp grass so early in the year.



CHAPTER XXIX.

AARON FALK AT HOME.



SATURDAY came, and Mrs. Lynn was well enough to accept the brewer's invitation. When Daphne was at home, the burden of Eliza Ann and her misdemeanours did not press so heavily upon her, and the refreshing lull that Saturday brought with it to the neighbourhood of the school and the schoolmistress's house worked wonders for Daphne's mother.

"One can hear one's self speak once a-week," she said, as she let Daphne arrange her shawl and tie her bonnet.

"Oh, mother," said Daphne, reproachfully, "it is only from twelve to half-past one that the children make a noise. It does them such good after lessons."

"I dare say it does them good, my dear. I suppose it does that girl good to be my servant. But it isn't pleasant, and I can't say I think so."

Daphne bit her lip.

"If you wish it, Eliza Ann shall go home," she said. The reform of Eliza Ann was to be a day-dream then.

"If she did, you'd never be content till you had found another just like her," said Mrs. Lynn, pushing her chair back, and feeling for her daughter's arm.

It was nearly half-past two when they got to Mr. Falk's house, and they had had their frugal dinner long before they started. But, to Miss Lynn's surprise, an elaborate luncheon was prepared for them in one

room, while the other was full of sunshine and books.

The windows of the last looked out, as we know, on to the pond and bridge, the lodge and approach to the Place, and the big elms that skirted the water. And close under the windows was Mr. Falk's garden, gay with bright spring flowers.

"How beautiful!" said Miss Lynn, as she stood, after luncheon was over, in the window, leaving her mother to talk to Mr. Falk.

He rose and pushed an arm-chair towards her.

"It is pretty," he said. "Won't you sit down?"

"Oh, thank you," said Daphne. She thought Mr. Falk as pleasant as he was great. She felt it was rather a condescension on his part to be so civil to a poor schoolmistress.

She dreamed away ten minutes at the

window, watching the swans dipping their long necks in the clear water, through which, even from the distance, she could see the bright green of the waving weeds. Then Mr. Falk came up to her and said—

“You are fond of flowers, I think, Miss Lynn. I can show you some better than those you were tying up in the field. My little greenhouse is small, but it is in good order, and I have a nice show of bloom on just now.”

“You will come too, mother?” said Daphne, seeing her mother sat still.

“I would rather rest here,” she answered. “I cannot see the flowers, and I am a little tired. Mr. Falk will be so good as to let me stay here, I’m sure, while you go round the garden.”

Daphne was disappointed.

“My mother is very fond of flowers,” she said as she went out, feeling she ought to make some apology for Mrs. Lynn’s

apparent want of appreciation of the greenhouse and garden.

Mr. Falk had no objection to taking the trouble of showing the garden to Mrs. Lynn at any other time—that is, of taking her round it, if he might look forward to the pleasure of having their company again. So he intimated to Miss Lynn as he went round the corner, and opened the greenhouse door.

A breath of warm scented air met them on the threshold.

“*Oh!*” said Daphne, finding no better means of expressing her delight and astonishment.

Great pots of lily of the valley, of narcissus and jonquils, of primulas, and hyacinths, all blooming together, made the little place a paradise in her eyes.

“I never saw anything like this,” she said earnestly, turning from sweet to sweet, and stooping over the lilies as if she could

never breathe in enough of their delicate perfume. "How glad I am I came now—that you were so kind as to ask us now! In another week they would have been over."

"Something else would have replaced them," said Mr. Falk, smiling. "But, as you like the early spring flowers so well, I am glad too that you came now."

"I *must* fetch my mother," said Miss Lynn; and before Mr. Falk could answer, she had sped round the garden to the house.

Mr. Falk smiled again, as he watched her. The little grave, pale, sedate school-mistress could change into this, could she? Well, it was a beautiful change, and he liked it. And yet he had thought the little sedate Miss Lynn very pretty, as she sat on Sundays playing the harmonium—as she turned her head to speak to the children,—as she found their places with her small ungloved hands.

Miss Lynn went away with a bunch of Neapolitan violets in those hands. Both she and her mother were deeply grateful to Mr. Falk for his kindness. If they *could* sometimes come on Saturdays and see those flowers, and that lovely view from the windows, and be civilly treated by a kind man like this, what a pleasure it might add to their life, thought Daphne! Her mother was like a changed being since she had been there.

She showed her gratitude as she lifted her earnest grey eyes to the brewer's face.

"You have given us such pleasure," she said, as she held out her hand. "We both thank you, sir, very much."

Aaron Falk looked pleased, till Daphne came to the word "sir." A shade of something that was not exactly annoyance passed over his face then. But it was only momentary; and as he held open the green swing-gate that let Mrs. Lynn and

her daughter out on to the village green, he said—

“I need not say it has been a pleasure to me. I trust, Miss Lynn, it is a pleasure you and Mrs. Lynn will often afford me.”

“We shall need very little temptation,” said Daphne, smiling, “but till Easter I shall be very busy.”

“He’s a nice young man,” said Mrs. Lynn, leaning on her daughter’s arm as they crossed the green. She had said just the same of Jonathan.

“Young, mother! he’s not at all young,” said Daphne.



CHAPTER XXX.

INNOVATIONS.



ASTER fell late that year. April, with sun and showers, was well in, and the spring flowers out of doors were in their full beauty by Passion Week.

Daphne was preparing an anthem and the most joyful hymns for Easter Day. All the Shelbourne world was to be astonished. No one knew of it but Mr. May, whose permission had been readily given. It was a secret between Daphne and the singers. An anthem had never been heard of in

Shelbourne, where six hymn - tunes had reigned without rival all through Mr. Byles's time. The old village fiddler, who played the harmonium in those days, had given up his place to Miss Lynn. He couldn't keep up with all the new-fangled tunes, he said.

"The Old Hundry went to a deal o' toons," he thought; "and as long as the toon goes along o' the hymn, what more could ye want? If the toons goes trillin' about where no one don't look for 'em to goo, half the folks has to stay behind. And then they haven't no sense to leave it alone, they haven't: but after it they'll come, some time or another, for have their squeak they will. They've got their seats, and they've got their books; and they dun' know as why they shouldn't sing. Wonderful set up is folks! Singin' a trade as well as tinkerin' or tailorin'; and what 'ud any one think if every one set

to work a tinkerin' and a tailorin', because other folks did it? Howsomever, that's the way of folks with singin'; and so, says I, give 'em toons as they can run along side of; for ketchin' up a toon's a sorry thing, and don't make ye feel willin' to praise God, even of a Sunday, in yer best clothes."

But by degrees the congregation had begun to learn the "new-fangled" tunes; and Daphne thought that by Easter they would be quite ready for an anthem.

She had fresh innovations to suggest. Might she and the children put flowers in the church on Easter Day? She had looked at the beautiful proportions of the building, at the massive stone font, the quaint monuments, and the glorious glints of colour from the old stained glass, till she longed to set it in moss and primroses, as she used to do at the church at Holme. Mr. May hesitated a little; he would think

about it ; he saw no harm ; but he would speak to Mrs. Myse first. He also spoke to Mr. Falk ; and both the little aunt and the autocratic brewer approved. So Daphne had her own way in this too.

Two or three days before Easter, she met Mr. May in the church, to settle what was to be done. Miss Lynn pointed out the only place in which she would need help.

"It would only want a little wire stretched across," she said, pointing to the sloping sill of the window that was to be banked with moss and flowers.

"Jonathan Cleare will do that for you," said the curate. "Perhaps you would tell him as you go home—you pass his mother's door, and the forge too—that he would oblige me by meeting you here on Saturday."

Miss Lynn found Mrs. Cleare's cottage, and knocked at the door. She was kept a

few minutes waiting, for the deaf woman did not hear the first knock. But the time seemed short to Daphne, for she stood in the prettiest cottage garden she had ever seen. Tufts of violets and primroses and pink hepaticas were flowering in the border, enclosed by the neatest of privet hedges; and young leaves were coming out on the many creepers that were trained carefully about the windows and the porch. Mrs. Cleare must be a nice woman to be so fond of flowers.

"I came," said Miss Lynn, when her second and louder tap had brought Jonathan's mother to the door, to bring a message from Mr. May. I think it is your son, Mrs. Cleare, who is the blacksmith, isn't it?"

"I'm so dull o' hearin', my dear—I beg your pardon, ma'am," she said, hastily correcting herself.

Miss Lynn repeated her words.

"Jonathan?" said Mrs. Cleare, her face lighting up. "Yes, he's my son. Is there anything as he can do for you, ma'am?"

She put her head on one side, to catch the answer.

Miss Lynn said Jonathan would oblige Mr. May by being at the church on Saturday morning.

Mrs. Cleare paused a moment, and then nodded her head a little dubiously.

"He'll be sure to come," she said, in her gentle, cheery voice. "Won't you look in a minute?"

"Is your husband ill?" asked Daphne, drawn towards the patient woman and the pale invalid sitting over the fire.

The elder Jonathan made some sound, intended for a greeting, and pushed his hand nervously across his face. Daphne thought she had seldom seen a harder face. How difficult it must be to live with him!

"Has he been long ill?" she asked, turning to his wife.

"Five year as ever is," she answered. "He got a mischief when he were liftin' a sack, and he never been right, not since then."

"Then you can't work?" said Daphne. "It must be a great trial, that."

A mumbled "yes" was the reply.

Miss Lynn felt she was not wanted, and turned to go. Mrs. Cleare followed her. Daphne's face was like a glint of sunlight to her—she could not lose it so soon.

"He don't say nothink," she said, in an undertone, as they stood in the garden. "but he's always sadly. I don't know right as how he feels, I don't. He don't say nothink; but I know he's bad by the looks of him; and the neighbours—they can hear him—and they says as he often moans by hisself in the garden. Very like he's a moanin' now to hisself by the fire,

on'y I don't hear him. He's a very close man, and he don't like for me to take much notice on him, he don't." And she looked wistfully at Daphne, as much as to say, "You don't know what a trouble that can be."

Daphne only looked sorrowfully at her in return. There seemed no words for troubles like that. Presently she said—

"You are very fond of flowers, Mrs. Cleare. How pretty your garden is."

"I don't do nothink," she answered, smiling, and shaking her head. "It's Jonathan, that's my son, as has done it. He's always wonderful arter flowers, he is. His flowers and his books, that's what he cares for. He were al'ays a good scholar, though he didn't get much larnin'. But he larnt to be a good son, he did, and that's the best lesson, I take it. He been always a good son to me, I know"—and her voice broke suddenly—"if it weren't for him, 's

father and I 'ud 'ave been long ago in Hebreth workhouse. Jonathan, he 'were away, and gettin' on first rate, he were. But his father took ill, and he come back soon as ever he got the letter ; and we're both beholden to him for all as ever we has—and it's all along o' him that we is so comfor'ble. He won't niver get on here, same as he did there ; but he's wonderful good to his mother and his father, he is."

And Mrs. Cleare fairly broke down, and dried her fast-falling tears with her apron.

As Daphne Lynn held out her hand to her to say good-bye, she felt that, in spite of the hard pale husband by the fire, she could not pity her.

"You'll come agin, if I'm not makin' too free asking of you?" said Jonathan's mother.

"I shall be very glad to come," said Daphne, as she went out.

"My dear, there's a letter for you," said

Mrs. Lynn, as her daughter came in. "I couldn't make out what the boy said, and of course Eliza Ann was out of the way. Up to some mischief, never fear."

Daphne opened a letter, addressed in a small, neat hand, which was lying on the table. It ran as follows:—

"The Brewery, Shelbourne.

"DEAR MISS LYNN,—I understand from Mrs. Myse that you think of decorating the church.

"I beg, therefore, to offer you any flowers, from my garden or greenhouse, which may be of use to you or take your fancy.

"With respects to Mrs. Lynn, believe me to remain,

Yours faithfully,

"AARON FALK."

"How kind!" said Miss Lynn. "I sup-

pose Mr. May must have asked for them."

Mrs. Lynn's eyes, though they were blind, twinkled saucily behind her spectacles.

END OF VOL. I.



WYMAN & SONS
PRINTERS,
STATIONERS,
& BOOKBINDERS,
GREAT QUEEN ST.
LONDON, W.C.



1790

1791

1792

1793

1794

1795

1796

1797

1798

1799

1800

1801

1802

1803

1804

1805

1806